

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

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## Introduction

“I didn’t become a librarian because I wanted to teach. In fact, the thought of teaching scared me to death.” By the time she wrote these words, Sarah Blakeslee had already overcome her fear of teaching and had successfully led a section of the first-year-experience course, “Introduction to University Life,” at the California State University at Chico. Although she had been trained as a cataloger, and teaching was not part of the work she expected to do as an academic librarian, Blakeslee had learned that the scope of work expected of a librarian in the contemporary college environment can be fluid and that, in an information age, every librarian may be called upon to become a teacher.<sup>1</sup>

Teaching, in fact, is a hallmark of the library profession today, as more and more people confront the challenges of accessing, retrieving, evaluating, and managing information from an ever-increasing variety of resources.<sup>2</sup> But, while the rapid evolution over the past decade of information technologies such as the World Wide Web has brought greater attention to

the librarian’s role as a teacher on the college campus, librarians have played an instructional role in higher education for over a century.<sup>3</sup> Despite both the historic professional commitment to the librarian as teacher, and the increasing demand for instruction in how to use an ever-changing array of print and electronic resources, however, few librarians are ever formally prepared to teach as part of their professional education.<sup>4</sup> Given the significance of the instructional role for librarians on the 21<sup>st</sup>-century campus, it is important to identify the ways in which academic librarians with little or no background in pedagogy, instructional design, or assessment of student learning meet the challenge of becoming effective teachers. Likewise, it is important to identify the ways in which academic libraries as organizations help librarians become more successful in the classroom, and the degree to which classroom performance is evaluated during formal professional reviews.

In short, how do librarians become better teachers, what motivates them to pursue professional develop-

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ment opportunities aimed at helping them to improve their instructional performance, in what ways are they supported in such efforts by their organizations, and in what ways is the instructional effectiveness of librarians formally reviewed and evaluated? This paper will provide some initial answers to these questions through a review of relevant literature in the study of college teaching and through a brief report of the results of a survey distributed to over 400 public services librarians housed in research libraries across the country. Neither the concerns that librarians have about their teaching effectiveness, nor the mechanisms they have put into place to address those concerns are unique to our profession, and there is much that we can learn in our quest to improve our own work as teachers from the experience of the broader efforts at instructional improvement aimed at the college faculty as a whole.

### Literature Review

A great deal has been written about teaching and learning in academic libraries over the past 30 years.<sup>5</sup> Much of this literature reflects the professional concerns of academic librarians struggling to define effective practice for what has been alternately referred to as “bibliographic instruction,” “user education,” or “information literacy instruction.”<sup>6</sup> Related to this concern about effective professional practice is a series of studies that explore the lack of pre-service professional education for librarians in the area of teaching.<sup>7</sup> More recently, studies have emerged that examine the formal review of the instructional performance of librarians through programs of student and/or peer evaluation.<sup>8</sup> But, while interest among academic librarians in the development of library-based instructional programs is evident in the literature, there is relatively little recognition in that literature of the parallel discussions found over the same time period in the broader study of college teaching. This review of the literature will: (1) present the findings of studies demonstrating the lack of attention to teacher training as part of the professional education of librarians; (2) introduce the concept of “instructional improvement,” as defined in the literature of college teaching; and (3) outline different programs designed to assess instructional effectiveness among academic librarians. Although space will not allow a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, even a brief review should suggest the relationship between the study of instructional improvement activities aimed at academic

librarians and those that have been developed to meet the needs of the broader college faculty.

### *The Education of Instruction Librarians*

Over the past two decades, information literacy instruction has become an established feature of the higher education curriculum. Recognition of the significance of information literacy as a learning outcome for today’s college students has resulted not only in increased opportunities for instructional collaboration between librarians and classroom faculty, but also in increased demand for direct instruction of faculty, staff, and students by librarians on issues related to the location, access, evaluation, and use of information.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, there have been new opportunities for librarians to develop and teach credit-bearing courses focusing on generic information literacy skills, information literacy skills as applied to the needs specific disciplines or programs, or issues related to the changing information environment writ large.<sup>10</sup> Librarians have also taken on leadership roles in developing instructional activities related to broader campus initiatives such as instruction in critical thinking, first-year-experience programs, and writing across the curriculum.<sup>11</sup> Given the demand for information literacy instruction in higher education, and the variety of opportunities offered to librarians who wish (or are called upon) to teach, it is important to examine the ways in which academic librarians are prepared for their professional work as teachers.

Although teaching has been recognized as part of the work of academic librarians for over a century, interest in what librarians have to teach has ebbed and flowed. The present “instruction movement” in academic libraries began in the early 1970s when the rising number of college students and the increasing diversity of the student population combined with an increasing sophistication in information technology to create a new interest in direct instruction in library use.<sup>12</sup> Patricia Breivik, one of the early leaders of this instruction movement, noted that the commitment to the instructional mission of the academic library would have an impact on the professional education needed by librarians. As she wrote: “Commitment to the educational functions of libraries will necessitate . . . a corollary commitment to continuing education and libraries will need to provide in-house training for their professional staffs and/or opportunities for them

to participate in courses and institutes where they can obtain expertise in teaching methodologies.”<sup>13</sup> Breivik focused on the need for continuing education because so few librarians had an opportunity to learn how to teach as part of their formal, pre-service professional education. Twenty-five years later, this continues to be the case.

In one of the earliest studies of this problem, Sharon Hogan noted that practicing librarians charged with delivering instruction to this new generation of college students consistently voiced the need for specialized training in teaching, but were required to develop their own programming through professional associations such as ACRL because so few LIS programs offered coursework in instruction. Little had changed by the 1980s, when a survey of LIS programs found that fewer than one-third offered a course in library instruction as part of the professional degree, and a survey of practicing librarians found that only a tiny percentage of the respondents had received formal instructional training as part of their professional education. Even after a decade of focused attention to the importance of information literacy instruction for the profession, surveys conducted in the late 1990s found that barely more than one-half of the LIS programs accredited by the American Library Association offered even an elective course on instruction to pre-service librarians. At present, the University of Washington is the only ALA-accredited LIS program that requires all students to complete a required course on instruction, and the University of Hawaii and the University of Iowa are the only ones providing a structured opportunity for a student teaching experience connected with an elective course on instruction.<sup>14</sup> Considering the fact that recent studies have shown that half of all academic librarian positions advertised in the late 1990s (and *all* of the academic reference positions advertised throughout the decade) included a required responsibility for direct instruction of students, this continued lack of attention to teacher training as part of the professional education of librarians is mystifying.<sup>15</sup>

With opportunities for formal study of teaching in pre-service professional education so limited, librarians have turned to self-study, workshops, and short courses offered through local, state, and national professional associations to meet their needs for continuing professional education. On-the-job training has been another option for librarians wishing to learn to teach (or to

improve their work as teachers). A survey of Wisconsin librarians conducted in 1986 found that self-study was the most common form of continuing education pursued by librarians hoping to improve their performance as teachers, but that workshops and in-house training programs were preferred. A national survey of instruction librarians conducted in 1988–89 likewise found that on-the-job training and self-study were the most common ways in which librarians obtained competence in professional skills related to teaching. Similar results were found in a national survey conducted in 2000, in which over 80 percent of respondents reported that they learned to teach through on-the-job training, and that they improved their teaching skills most often through self-study.<sup>16</sup>

Self-study has been facilitated over the past 15–20 years through the publication of textbooks such as *Library Instruction for Librarians* (1989) and *Information Literacy Instruction: Theory and Practice* (2001), and professional materials such as *Learning to Teach: Workshops on Instruction* (1993). A wealth of literature has been published in professional and scholarly journals, and interested librarians have also been able to turn to *Research Strategies*, a peer-reviewed journal dedicated specifically to examining instructional services in libraries. Workshops are provided regularly by professional associations such as the Library Instruction Round Table and the ACRL Instruction Section, and, most recently, ACRL invested in the development of a national “Institute for Information Literacy” aimed at providing basic instruction in learning theory, instructional design, and presentation skills, as well as advanced instruction in program management and assessment of student learning.<sup>17</sup> Thus, while instruction as a field of study continues to hold a marginal place in the pre-service professional education of the majority of librarians, there is an active market for continuing education in this area. Given the significance of continuing education opportunities as the primary means by which academic librarians learn about teaching and improve their teaching skills, and the variety of opportunities currently available to them, it is important to know which opportunities academic librarians are most likely to pursue, the factors that encourage or discourage their pursuit of these opportunities, and the degree to which academic librarians feel supported by their organizations in the pursuit of instructional improvement.

### *Instructional Improvement in Higher Education*

Instructional improvement is a term found in the literature of college teaching to describe professional development opportunities for college faculty aimed at helping them improve their performance in the classroom.<sup>18</sup> Many of the themes addressed in the literature of college teaching also appear regularly in studies of professional development and review programs for academic librarians. Chief among these are: (1) the charge that faculty have not been well prepared for their work as teachers; (2) the fact that instructional work has become the focus of greater attention on the college campus for the past 30 years and that, as a result, faculty have become the audience for a wide variety of professional development programs aimed at improving college teaching; and, (3) the idea that support for a “culture of teaching” on campus is critical to the success of attempts to improve instruction.

For example, while it is undoubtedly true that few librarians receive direct instruction in how to teach as part of their professional education, the same has long been said of our colleagues among the “teaching faculty.” One of the earliest national studies of college teaching found that graduate education is only “indirectly concerned with teaching.” Almost two decades later, another student of college teaching likewise concluded that “the graduate training of college professors has been found to be generally ineffective in preparing them for their role as teachers.” As late as the 1990s, leading scholars and practitioners in the “faculty development” movement repeated these concerns.<sup>19</sup> The challenge of becoming an effective teacher is most significant for new faculty, many of whom come into their first professional position with “little or no teaching experience,” and whose professional socialization into their instructional role is often haphazard, at best. In study after study, teaching is consistently identified as one of the most challenging responsibilities for new members of the college faculty owing to a lack of effective preparation for this role.<sup>20</sup>

Like other college teachers, academic librarians are responsible for a wide variety of professional activities, including teaching, research, and service (not to mention the design and delivery of information services, the development and maintenance of print and electronic collections, the establishment and control of metadata schemes that facilitate access to print and electronic resources, etc.). Also like their colleagues, it is often the

instructional role for which they are least prepared and, one might argue, least likely to be rewarded.

Like academic librarians, college faculty in all disciplines have found greater attention being paid to their instructional work over the past 20–30 years than had been the case in the past.<sup>21</sup> As a result, a second important theme in the literature is that college faculty have become the audience for a variety of professional development activities aimed at improving their performance as classroom teachers.<sup>22</sup> A number of surveys of professional development programs for college faculty have been conducted in order to identify precisely which of these mechanisms have been put into place, and which are considered by faculty members to be most effective in motivating them to focus on instructional improvement.<sup>23</sup> Weimer and Lenze (1997) organized the wide variety of instructional improvement activities available to college faculty into five overarching types of “instructional interventions” that can also be used as a framework for examining instructional improvement activities in academic libraries: (1) workshops and seminars; (2) consultation with instructional designers and campus teaching experts; (3) instructional grants (e.g., funding for instructional resources; awards of release time for developing instructional resources or pursuing opportunities to learn more about teaching); (4) distribution of resource materials (e.g., synopses of effective teaching practices drawn from the literature); and (5) programs that allow colleagues to offer collegial review and support of each other’s instructional activities (e.g., faculty discussion groups on instructional issues; mentoring programs focused on improving teaching).<sup>24</sup> Academic librarians are rarely included in surveys of professional development activities provided for college faculty, but the issues and practices identified in these surveys as significant for understanding instructional improvement on the college campus can also be used to examine instructional improvement in the academic library.

The final major theme that may be drawn out of the literature of college teaching that is of significance to academic librarians is the idea of a “culture of teaching” as critical to any departmental or institutional attempt to improve the quality of instructional performance. Paulsen and Feldman (1995, 1999) and McKinney (2002), among others, have identified a number of distinctive elements of a culture of teaching, including:

- senior administrators demonstrate a commitment to supporting instructional activities and faculty attention to instructional improvement;
- faculty are involved in planning and implementing activities and programs aimed at improving teaching;
- faculty interact frequently—formally and informally—to discuss instructional issues;
- professional development resources related to college teaching are available on campus, including a teaching center that houses experts in instructional design and improvement; and
- demonstration of effective teaching is a component of all appointment, promotion, and tenure decisions.<sup>25</sup>

To positively influence professional performance, a culture of teaching must be shared across an academic unit—whether that unit is a department, a college, or a library. Among the most important facets of a healthy culture of teaching are support from senior administrators and a commitment to documentation of instructional effectiveness as part of annual review processes and other personnel processes.

Administrative support for instructional improvement is only one facet of a healthy culture of teaching in a department or college, but it is the one around which many others revolve. In a national survey of instructional improvement activities offered to college faculty, Wright and O'Neil (1994) reported widespread support for the belief that administrators “play a pivotal role in improving teaching by creating an environment in which the importance of the teaching function is articulated and supported.” Similar conclusions regarding the importance of administrative support for instructional improvement were drawn by Bensimon, Ward, and Sanders (2000), Lucas (1989), Seldin et al. (1990), and Weimer (1990). Owing especially to their ability to reward good teaching and to provide support for individual faculty efforts aimed at instructional improvement, administrators are able to put into place many of the mechanisms that can support a culture of teaching across a department, library, college, or campus.<sup>26</sup>

Also related to the broader notion of the culture of teaching is the increasing importance of evaluation of instructional performance. Peer review of teaching and of instructional materials, the addition of requirements for teaching portfolios to annual review processes, and

the establishment of awards for exemplary teaching by individuals and departments have all become a familiar part of the professional landscape of college teaching over the past decade.<sup>27</sup> Faculty evaluation programs that include methods such as peer review and the documentation of instructional effectiveness through the use of teaching portfolios have brought new attention to the issue of instructional improvement, and these issues have recently begun to shape initiatives in the formal review and evaluation of the professional performance of academic librarians.

### *Instructional Improvement in Academic Libraries*

Just as college faculty, as a whole, have faced pressure to more effectively document their success in the classroom in recent years, so have academic librarians. Chapman, Pettway, and White (2001) identified three organizational and professional forces shaping the call to document instructional effectiveness among academic librarians: (1) the emergence of new standards for student mastery of information literacy skills; (2) the inclusion of information literacy instruction as part of the accreditation requirements both for academic programs and for academic institutions; and (3) the need perceived by library administrators to document the direct contributions of librarians to the instructional mission of the parent institution. While evaluation of library instruction may have once been the “weak link” in the overall instructional service program of academic libraries, now it is a central concern. But, while academic libraries across the country are beginning to explore the development of formal programs for instructional improvement and assessment, there have been relatively few studies of current practice.<sup>28</sup>

Until very recently, in fact, the only formal research in this area came from a survey conducted in the mid-1990s by Patrick Ragains (1997). In this electronic-mail survey, Ragains collected responses from 44 librarians across the country responding to questions about their use of formal instruments designed to demonstrate the effectiveness of library instruction. Ragains identified three primary purposes behind the collection of student evaluations of library instruction: (1) to provide direct feedback to individual librarians; (2) to be used in program evaluation; and (3) to provide evidence of instructional effectiveness to be used as part of a regular performance review.<sup>29</sup>

A more rigorous approach to studying this issue can be found in the 2003 survey of ARL member libraries by DeFranco and Bleiler, which included a variety of questions regarding the composition of assessment instruments and the purposes to which the results of assessment of instruction were put by individual libraries and librarians. Among the conclusions that one might draw from the DeFranco and Bleiler study is that, while no longer uncommon, formal assessment of instructional effectiveness remains unevenly applied even in large research libraries. For example, only 63 percent of respondents reported that their libraries practiced formal assessment of instruction. Moreover, informal mechanisms for assessment were as likely to be present as formal ones. Finally, consistent with the conclusions drawn by Ragains, DeFranco and Bleiler found that the most common purpose of conducting assessment of instruction was program improvement rather than staff evaluation or for use in making personnel decisions as part of the annual review or appointment, promotion and tenure process. Thus, while DeFranco and Bleiler suggest that librarians are paying an increasing amount of attention to the issue of assessment of instructional performance, the professional practices they document are relatively limited compared with those now routinely applied as part of the assessment of the instructional performance of other college teachers (a fact noted indirectly by respondents who, according to DeFranco and Bleiler, reported “significant dissatisfaction . . . with the measures by which by which assessments are conducted”).<sup>30</sup>

The remaining literature available on the subject of instructional improvement programs in academic libraries is more anecdotal than analytical, and includes reports of innovative programs for peer assessment of library instruction, the use of teaching portfolios among academic librarians, and the development of extensive, in-house training programs focused on teaching and learning.<sup>31</sup>

Peer coaching is a collegial approach to fostering instructional improvement that has recently become popular in academic libraries. A description of a representative program can be found at the Syracuse University Library (2003). The goal of this voluntary program is “to help librarians develop instructional skills in a non-threatening, non-evaluative atmosphere, and to learn new ideas and approaches from their colleagues.” Key to this program is its voluntary nature

and its focus on formative assessment of instructional performance. Similar programs have been established at Dartmouth College, the University of Notre Dame, and the University of Massachusetts–Amherst. While each of these programs identify a number of discrete teaching skills that may serve as the focus for improvement through the peer coaching process, perhaps the most important benefit of participation is the promise such programs hold for increasing regular discussions about teaching among academic librarians. Discussion of this sort is a distinguishing feature of a culture of teaching and the “non-threatening” nature of the programs at these institutions promises to foster communication and collaboration among colleagues related to their instructional responsibilities.<sup>32</sup>

As noted above, however, calls for accountability for instructional effectiveness are also a feature of the contemporary professional environment for college teachers, and another recently-developed model for facilitating instructional improvement among academic librarians focuses on summative assessment of teaching through the annual review, promotion, and tenure process. Cheryl Middleton describes the evolution of a peer evaluation program at the Oregon State University Libraries aimed at fostering instructional improvement among librarians while also meeting institutional requirements for demonstration of formal review of teaching activities by members of the OSU faculty. While the actual activities associated with the peer evaluation model may be similar to those found in the peer coaching model (e.g., classroom observations with written feedback to the librarian under observation), the fact that the former is tied to the annual review, promotion, and tenure process raises the stakes for all involved.<sup>33</sup>

Both peer coaching and peer evaluation of teaching are models for instructional improvement that have long been found among members of the classroom faculty at colleges and universities. Likewise familiar to many members of the classroom faculty is another approach to documenting instructional effectiveness currently finding favor among academic librarians—the teaching portfolio. Chapman, Pettway, and White (2001) provide a description of a comprehensive teaching portfolio used at Valdosta State University not to demonstrate the effectiveness of individual librarians as teachers, but to demonstrate the effectiveness of the library instruction program. Through the completion of

student evaluations, peer evaluations, and self evaluations, librarians document effective teaching strategies, create an archive of useful instructional materials, and contribute to an atmosphere of “reflective practice” among teaching librarians. While VSU employs what might be referred to as a “program portfolio,” many academic librarians across the country have demonstrated interest in the use of an teaching portfolio as a means of demonstrating individual instructional effectiveness.<sup>34</sup>

Finally, a number of academic libraries have worked to meet interest in instructional improvement through in-house workshops and training programs. On-the-job training remains the most common approach to professional development activities among academic librarians, and a number of studies have demonstrated this to be the case for instructional improvement activities.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, research on instructional improvement activities among the college faculty finds that workshops remain among the most commonly used approaches to program development.<sup>36</sup> An exemplary model for workshop programming can be found in the “University Library Instructor College” at the University of Michigan. Providing a list of professional literature as well as a link to instructional improvement resources on campus, the Instructor College has also provided workshops led both by librarians and by faculty drawn from across campus on topics such as instructional collaboration, classroom presentation skills, learning theory, instructional design, and assessment of student learning. Similar programs of ongoing workshops drawing on instructional expertise found both within the library and across campus can be found at numerous institutions, and the General Libraries at the University of Texas have taken this approach to the online environment by developing a series of Web-based workshop resources related to teaching and learning in academic libraries.<sup>37</sup>

Programs such as these demonstrate the keen interest in instructional improvement among academic librarians, but attempts to identify a national collection of instructional improvement resources for academic librarians or to link these efforts to broader trends in instructional improvement programs for college faculty have been limited. The next step in the study of teaching and learning in academic libraries is to facilitate the identification of these resources, to identify a set of best practices for instructional improvement in academic

libraries, and to integrate discussions of librarian-led instruction into broader discussions of college teaching at the campus and national levels.

### **Design of the Study**

Following the conclusion drawn above that there is a significant relationship between the study of instructional programs in academic libraries and the broader study of college teaching, the present study made use of a survey instrument similar to those used in earlier studies of support for instructional improvement among the college faculty. Using earlier instruments as models, the author developed a preliminary set of survey items that were reviewed by colleagues at Washington State University in the College of Education and the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology. Comments received on this initial set of items were used to revise the survey instrument and a final draft of the instrument was used in a pilot study in March 2004. Final revisions to the instrument were made following the conclusion of the pilot study, and the survey was disseminated to its target population between June and August 2004.

The population for this study was defined as public services librarians serving in academic libraries in the United States that held membership in the Association of Research Libraries. A random sample of 13 institutions was drawn from the 2004 ARL membership and all public services librarians who could be identified using the institutional Web site received an invitation by electronic mail to complete the Web-based survey in June 2004 (n=461). A reminder was sent in July, and a final invitation to complete the survey was sent in August. By the time the survey site was closed at the end of August 2004, a total of 98 usable responses had been collected for a response rate of 21 percent.

### **Results**

While space will not allow a complete report of the findings of this study, one can draw a number of initial conclusions related to the core questions identified earlier, i.e.:

1. What activities do academic librarians pursue in order to become more effective teachers?
2. What motivates academic librarians to pursue instructional improvement activities?
3. In what ways are individual librarians supported by the organizations in their pursuit of instructional improvement?

4. In what ways is one's performance as a teacher formally evaluated as part of the professional review process?

Finally, one may draw from some conclusions from the responses to this survey regarding the degree to which a "culture of teaching" exists in academic libraries.

In order to identify what activities academic librarians pursue in order to become more effective teachers, participants were asked to identify the activities they thought would be most effective in helping them to improve their own teaching, and the frequency with which they actually participated in such activities. Table 1 shows the instructional improvement activities that respondents suggested would most help them to improve their own teaching. Items are listed in rank order from highest to lowest for items in which the suggested activity was rated likely to be "very helpful" by at least 20 percent of the respondents.

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%

Table 2 shows the instructional improvement activities in which respondents reported most frequent participation. Items are listed in rank order from highest to lowest in which the suggested activity was reported as being engaged in *at least monthly* by at least 20 percent of the respondents.

Read professional literature related to instructional services in libraries	57%
Read professional literature related to college teaching and/or higher education	36%
Consult colleagues in the library	35%
Talk with campus faculty about teaching	25%

Two other activities noted as being perceived as "very helpful" to instructional improvement also received notice in this item, but at a lower frequency. For example, 67 percent of respondents reported that they attended professional conferences that included information literacy programming at least once a year, while 58 percent reported the same frequency of attendance at programs sponsored by an in-house training program.

In order to identify what motivates academic librarians to pursue instructional improvement activities, participants were asked to identify how influential a given reason might be for their decision to pursue an opportunity for professional development in the area of instruction. Table 3 shows the factors most likely to influence an individual librarian to pursue an opportunity for instructional improvement. Items are listed in rank order from highest to lowest in which a given factor was deemed to be "critically" important to one's decision to pursue an instructional improvement opportunity by at least 20 percent of the respondents.

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%

In order to identify the ways in which academic libraries support individual librarians in their pursuit of instructional improvement, participants were asked to identify the specific programs or practices provided by their local organizations. Table 4 shows opportunities

Release time/financial support for attendance at professional conferences	88%
Release time/financial support for attendance at workshops focused on instruction	78%
Feedback from students	72%
Release time/financial support for continuing education courses	70%

for instructional improvement identified by at least 50 percent of the respondents as being available locally.

In order to determine the ways in which one's performance as a teacher has become incorporated into formal professional review processes, participants were asked to identify whether or not assessment of teaching was part either of the annual review process or, when applicable, of the promotion and tenure process. Only 46 percent of respondents reported that assessment of instruction was a part of such review processes. Those who responded that assessment of instruction was part of their review processes were then asked to identify the mechanisms for assessment of instructional performance supported as part of those processes. Table 5 shows the complete range of responses received from survey participants (total response rate is greater than 100 percent owing to multiple mechanisms being in place in individual libraries).

Student evaluation	57%
Self-assessment	49%
Peer coaching/evaluation	49%
Supervisor evaluation	25%
Teaching portfolios	7%

Finally, while virtually all participants reported that issues related to improvement and assessment of the instructional performance of librarians were under discussion in their organizations, and a variety of mechanisms are clearly in place that might help libraries and librarians to address these issues, the question remains to what extent the existence of such discussions and the implementation of such programs reflect the development of a culture of teaching in academic libraries similar to that which has been identified as critical to the development of instructional improvement programs campus wide?

In order to begin exploring this complex question of organizational culture, participants were asked to identify the facets identified in the literature of higher education as being representative of a healthy culture of teaching that they thought would be most likely to improve the quality of instruction in their libraries, and then to identify the degree to which they agreed that these actually existed within their libraries. Table

6 shows the facets of a culture of teaching that respondents thought would be most important to actually improving the teaching conducted through their libraries. Items are listed in rank order from highest to lowest

Library administration recognizes the importance of teaching responsibilities	69%
Library Administration promotes instruction as a core library service	63%
Teaching is specifically recognized in annual reviews and/or promotion and tenure decisions	62%
Availability of funding for attendance at workshops focused on teaching	52%
Orientation for librarians new to teaching	50%

in which a given facet was deemed "very important" to improving local instruction by at least 50 percent of the respondents.

Table 7 shows the facets of a culture of teaching that at least 50 percent of respondents agreed were present in their organizations.

Library administration recognizes the importance of teaching responsibilities	77%
Teaching is specifically recognized in annual reviews and/or promotion and tenure decisions	70%
Library administration promotes instruction as a core library service in annual reports or other publications	68%
Library administration gives visibility to instructional improvement activities	55%
Hiring practices require demonstration of teaching ability	54%

### Discussion and Implications for Future Research

While this survey raises as many questions as it answers (for example, does the fact that a majority of respondents reported that hiring practices in their libraries

require a demonstration of teaching skills mean that poor performance in that area has ever actually prevent someone from being hired?), we may draw a number of initial conclusions from its results.

For example, the results of this survey corroborate earlier work conducted on the education and professional development of instruction librarians. Attendance at in-house workshops and conference programs remain among the most preferred methods for improving instruction, and self-study through regular review of the literature of information literacy instruction remains one of the methods most frequently used. This finding also coincides with similar studies of instructional improvement practices among college faculty as a whole.

Also significant and worthy of further study is the degree to which consultation with colleagues within the library and, to a lesser extent, across the college teaching community is both seen as a valuable means of improving one's work as a teacher and is actually engaged on a regular basis. It is likely that the popularity of peer assessment of instruction is rooted in this orientation toward peers as an effective resource for becoming a better teacher (e.g., while 36% of respondents thought that consulting library colleagues would be "very helpful" to them in improving their instructional work, only 17% said the same about consulting with instructional support and design personnel outside the library). The focus on peer interactions also reflects the importance of providing opportunities for substantive discussion among colleagues of teaching and of issues related to instructional performance. Stephen Brookfield, a leading adult educator, wrote that "silence surrounds us as teachers," and faculty development expert Robert A. Armour noted that establishing programs that foster "good conversation about teaching" is critical to the development of a campus culture of teaching.<sup>38</sup> An exemplary model for supporting regular discussions of teaching can be found at The Ohio State University Libraries, which supports an Instruction and Outreach Committee that sponsors both regular "brown-bag" discussions of instruction, as well as a more substantial annual retreat. While Ohio State may be unusual in the fine articulation of its program, several academic libraries have established regular opportunities for discussion of instructional issues, including both formal retreats and less formal (but more frequent) meetings for teaching librarians. Further research is needed on

how such opportunities for "good conversation about teaching" in academic libraries complement formal programs for instructional improvement and assessment of instructional performance.<sup>39</sup>

Next, the results of this survey reflect the broader consensus among instructional improvement professionals and scholars in the field of college teaching regarding the critical role of administrative leadership for any instructional improvement initiative. Administrative leadership has been identified as critical to the development of a culture of teaching and its attendant focus on "taking teaching seriously" as a professional responsibility, and the participants in this survey clearly agreed as they identified administrative support and activities that are best promoted by senior leadership as being the most critical to the establishment of a culture of teaching in their libraries. Recognizing the importance of instructional responsibilities, promoting the library as an instructional center on campus, and providing ongoing support to librarians interested in improving their work as teachers are all commitments that must be made at the administrative level if a focus on instructional improvement is to become pervasive throughout an academic library. Academic library leaders, however, have a number of roles that they might fruitfully promote for the library on campus, including the traditional role of the library as gateway to information resources and the emergent role of the library as a hub for thinking about the place of information technology in higher education. It will be important for future research to focus on senior administrators in academic libraries to determine how ready and willing they are to serve as instructional leaders for their professional staff and to work to focus campus attention on the active role of the library and librarians in the teaching and learning process.

The results of this survey and its related literature review also suggest that there are more similarities between the position of academic librarians learning to teach and that of their colleagues among the teaching faculty than we may have appreciated in the past. Both the literature of college teaching and the literature of academic librarianship suggest that many of us are ill-prepared for one of our most important professional responsibilities when we take our first position in academe. While the college faculty have been the subject of a variety of instructional improvement programs as part of the focus on faculty development over the past

30 years, academic librarians have built a parallel network of professional development opportunities found primarily in the regular offerings of local, state, and national library associations. As the instructional work of many academic librarians has increasingly come to resemble that of other college teachers, it would make sense for academic librarians to take greater advantage of instructional improvement programs offered on their own campuses to other members of the faculty and instructional staff. More research is required into the nature of collaborative programming between the academic library and units such as the campus teaching center, and further inquiry needs to be done to bring academic librarians more clearly into the fold when instructional improvement initiatives are being promoted across campus.

Finally, as important as bringing together the discussions of instructional improvement for college faculty and of professional development for academic librarians engaged in information literacy instruction are the lessons that we can learn from the literature of college teaching about the design of formal assessment of instructional performance. Fewer than half of the respondents to this survey indicated that professional performance as a teacher was evaluated as part of formal review processes, but even this response reflects an upward trend from earlier studies that suggested that evaluation of instruction, if conducted at all, was primarily designed for program review, rather than individual review. Regular messages to the ILL-L electronic discussion list over the past 2–3 years on topics such as the development and use of teaching portfolios and the development and implementation of mechanisms for peer review of teaching in libraries also suggest increasing interest in this topic. Again, since there has been so much interest in peer review of teaching and in the development of holistic and appropriate mechanisms for faculty evaluation among the academic community over the past decade, it makes sense for library leaders and senior administrators to apply the lessons learned by scholars such as Peter Seldin, John A. Centra, and Raoul A. Arreola to the development of professional evaluation programs for academic librarians.<sup>40</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Instruction programs in academic libraries are at a crossroads. While instruction has been provided to

college students by academic librarians for over a century, changes to both the student population and the information environment over the past 30 years have resulted in a significant increase in the scope and prominence of library-based instructional programs across the United States and around the world. Writing about the situation in Australian higher education, Judith Peacock referred to an historic moment for the academic library profession during which broad interest in information literacy skills provides an opportunity for librarians to become “key educators in the teaching and learning environment . . . empowered with an educational competence and professional confidence equal to that of their academic peers.” Studies by academic librarians, faculty development experts and scholars of the college teaching profession all suggest that we currently face a similarly pivotal moment in the academic library profession in the United States.<sup>41</sup>

College teaching is likewise at a crossroads. While many of us are familiar with the debate over the increasing use of graduate students and adjunct faculty in teaching positions, this is only one of many forces seen by experienced observers of college teaching as fundamentally re-shaping that professional environment. The impact of information technology on teaching and learning, the rise of increasingly interdisciplinary approaches to academic research, and the emphasis on formal evaluation of instructional effectiveness described briefly above are all part of what Devorah Liberman and Alan Guskin recently referred to as “new higher education models.” These new models offer a wealth of opportunities for academic librarians (and others) to add significant teaching responsibilities to their role on campus, e.g., in first-year-experience programs and in interdisciplinary programs aimed at supporting instruction in research methods or the use of technology by current and future faculty members. Gary Rhoades identified this increasing focus on the teaching role of “non-faculty professionals” on campus as one of the most significant challenges facing the traditional vision of college teaching and the role of the teaching faculty in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>42</sup> For those of us who embrace a “non-traditional” vision, however, this provides an unprecedented opportunity. By seeing our work within the broader context of college teaching, academic librarians will be better prepared to meet the challenges of instructional improvement and better equipped to take advantage of opportunities

to bring information professionals closer to the core instructional mission of their campuses.

Academic librarians across the country have begun to focus their attention on the improvement and assessment of their own instructional performance and that of their colleagues. By learning from the experiences of the leading programs identified in this study and by building on the ideas and concerns raised by the participants in the present survey, we can begin to identify some of the factors—both individual and organizational—that may help to foster a culture of teaching in academic libraries and a focus on instructional improvement. Over a decade ago, faculty development experts Maryellen Weimer and Lisa F. Lenze noted that efforts to improve instruction on the college campus were occurring primarily “within the realm of practice,” i.e., practice was preceding research.<sup>43</sup> The same has been true of instructional improvement programs in academic libraries. Our bases for establishing effective practices, however, have grown considerably over the past 5 years, and the time is now ripe for research that can guide practice in the future.

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