9. Shaping Student Learning through Embedded Librarianship in Area Studies

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The majority of articles published on embedded librarianship focus on its benefits or discuss how embedded librarians integrate themselves in courses. Few articles describe the long-term effects of embedded librarianship in a traditional course for graduate students, particularly in area studies. Embedded librarianship can be applied to a variety of circumstances and thus, for the purposes of this paper, the term is used to describe the role of the librarian in which their duties "generally involve activities outside of the library" (Rudasill 2010, 84). Embedded also describes "any librarian that takes an active role inside the online classroom" (Becker 2010, 237). Whether the class is online or in a traditional face-to-face setting, the level of involvement is fairly similar.

Background

Prior to the fall of 2013, the Center for Latin American & Caribbean Studies (CLACS) at the University of Kansas (KU) had a research class, "LAA 700: Latin American Library Resources." This class was taught by the subject librarian. However, preceding my arrival at the University of Kansas, it was decided that it would be taught by faculty in the Global and International Studies Graduate Program (GIS Graduate) and cross-listed in the CLACS Department. I reached out to GIS faculty to discuss possible options to continue to be involved in the class even though it was now part of another program's curriculum. My goal was to be part of the class rather than to provide just one information literacy session during the semester. Over the summer months, the two assigned faculty members and I maintained close contact to ensure good integration of information literacy skills in the class. They were in charge of the development of the syllabus while I ran the information literacy portion of the class. The class program specified that I would be a guest lecturer once during the semester. In practice, I attended over 40 percent of the class meetings.

The class included twelve students, four from Latin American and Caribbean Studies and eight from the Global and International Graduate

Studies Program. As a co-teacher for this class, I had permission to access the learning management system, Blackboard, as a "Teacher Assistant." This allowed me to view students' responses to assignments as well as to post notes and PowerPoint presentations from class.

I was present during the first class of the semester, and was introduced to the students as the librarian who was going to be in most of the classes. I chose to sit amongst the students, in an effort to become part of their group rather than as an instructor figure. I took notes of which semester the students were in, their research interests, and projects. My primary role in the class was to offer research support and not to grade them.

Five classes into the semester it was my turn to stand in front of the class. This group's level of research skills was not apparent, so the first part of the lesson was a quick review of the resources available to them at the University of Kansas Libraries. This review included items like "turning a question into search terms," searching the catalog and selected databases, and using inter-library loan. The second part of the lesson was focused entirely on individual research questions. The topics covered a wide area of disciplines as well as geographical locations. Examples included: the increase in sex trafficking in connection with large sporting events, the feasibility of hemp as a sustainable crop for Paraguay, and the viability of importing water from Russia to help alleviate its scarcity in China.

There was no overlap between research questions or approaches to locating information, and this made the second part of the class less organized. I had to go to each student to lead them in the right direction with their research question. This task took more time than scheduled. At the students' request, and after some revision and added information, the class presentation was uploaded to Blackboard.

Communication between the teaching faculty and the librarian are key components to the success of the collaboration. It allows the librarian to tailor subsequent lessons to correspond with students' development (Miller 2014, 31). For the second lesson in research, I teamed up with the faculty to create an assignment that tied the previous information literacy session in with the rest of the class program. Students had to answer two questions:

1. Which of the resources discussed in class or available through the library will be the most useful for your thesis research? Why?

2. Keeping your research project in mind, give specific examples (two or three) of primary or secondary sources found in any of the databases discussed in class. (Please indicate whether it is a primary or secondary source and, in a couple of sentences, discuss how you will be able to utilize this source in your work.)

Patterns began to emerge from the responses to the assignment. Among the most listed resources were the KU catalog, WorldCat, *Bibliography of Asian*

Studies, Google Scholar, *EconLit*, and the World Bank Database. Some students noted services like interlibrary loan and LibGuides. Several also mentioned the usefulness of tools within the databases. These included the "cited by" option in Google Scholar, and the option to narrow one's results in Business Source Complete. Students continuously referred to a book or an article as their primary resource for their individual projects. Having access to Blackboard proved invaluable on this occasion. It was apparent that students referred to the main source for their research as their primary one. To bridge this gap, I created a handout explaining the differences between primary and secondary sources. This handout was shared in the second class. Students discussed their own knowledge of primary and secondary sources in contrast to the definitions provided on the handout.

I taught two more sessions covering statistical sources and archival documents, and also continued to provide one-on-one consultations for the students throughout the rest of the class. Many of the students maintained communication with me in the spring semester via email or face-to-face consultations. The majority came in for research assistance, while others emailed regarding questions with interlibrary loan or purchase requests. Throughout these consultation sessions, students volunteered information regarding the class, which caused me to reevaluate and draw new boundaries.

Measuring Student Learning Impact

Throughout the semester, I met with the assigned faculty members regularly and discussed the importance of measuring how student learning had been affected after taking the class. A small focus group was chosen as the ideal way to gather feedback. It was determined that the focus group would be held after the semester, to avoid lack of participation or cooperation due to impending grades. It was also decided that the faculty would not be present during the focus group to allow students the opportunity to provide honest and unbiased feedback.

A Doodle Poll was created to determine students' time availability. The response rate was 33 percent or only four students. The low participation rate had a variety of causes, including but not limited to students dropping out of the program, or living outside Lawrence where the main campus is located.

I met the four students for one hour, during which nine questions were discussed. The questions were divided between general ones about the class experience and those related to a librarian's participation in the class. Since distance was one of the reasons why some students did not participate in the focus group, a short survey was created using Google Forms and was distributed among those who did not respond to the meeting call. This approach returned two more responses, which increased the response rate to 50 percent

or a total of six participants. The summary and discussion of responses that follows is a mixture of the information gathered in the focus group, as well as data from the survey responses.

When asked about their overall experience in taking the course, the comments of students generally fell into one of two categories. On one hand, it was an enjoyable experience since it exposed them to various methods of research. On the other, they felt that the course load was on the heavy side.

One student complained that the class was so time-consuming that it did not leave room to work on developing his own research project, the very one he needed to graduate. Another student felt that by covering so many methods the students were not studying any of them in depth. As a follow-up, a second student remarked that, "it was much harder to complete assignments when the method does not apply to your research project."

Given that the course was co-taught by two faculty members and I was only there in a supportive role, students were questioned if it was helpful to have two instructors. It was a surprise to hear the majority of students remark on how useful it was to have a librarian in the class, but the role of the second teacher was almost entirely overlooked since his presence was so infrequent. Students agreed that he came in only once to lecture and, in their minds, this did not make him a class co-instructor. Instead, they felt that I filled that role.

Along those lines, students also remarked that the expertise of their primary teacher in research methodology, in conjunction with that of a librarian in class, was very helpful. The inclusion of a librarian had a causal effect in their overall perception of the library. For some of them it was a chance to realize that libraries offer many more services beyond lending books. For others it opened the door to establish a relationship that will continue well into the end of their program. Students were made aware at the beginning of the class that they were welcome to come in and seek my assistance for their projects. My schedule was far more open and flexible than the restrictive office hours of faculty. This contrast allowed students more opportunities to develop a relationship with their librarian, and to really spend time working on their research topics with the help of someone who was familiar with their class. It also created some unexpected situations. On one occasion, a student asked me to proofread a paper (the paper was for a spring semester symposium). While the door was always open for almost anything before, it became apparent that "an embedded librarian should set boundaries" (Becker 2010, 239).

Students were asked what elements of the class they had found most helpful. The answers discussed centered on concerns or suggestions for future classes, rather than the elements that did work for them. A few insightful remarks, however, showed that they did find some things beneficial. One of the students commented that the class structure, with various deadlines for the assignments, helped get the thesis and literature review underway.

There were many suggestions offered to improve the course, ranging from when and where to offer it, to how many days a week it should be taught. The class was offered through the Global and International Program, based in our Kansas City location, Edwards Campus. The majority of the students enrolled in it were based in Lawrence so, to attend the evening class, they had to travel thirty-three miles in each direction once a week. Not all of the students had a car to make the trip, so they either relied on other students to get a ride or took the bus. The last option invariably made their trip twice as long. Some students also thought it would be good to have the class twice a week rather than just once. This would allow them more time to better digest the material.

Though gathering information on students' experiences in this class was highly important for its future, my primary interest lay in an embedded librarian's impact on the students' research process in the long run. No data regarding students' research ability or confidence was gathered prior to their taking the class. The data collected in the focus group and through the online survey was all based on students' perception of changes in their own abilities over time.

Students were asked about their confidence level in doing research before and after the class. Some respondents identified themselves as "not very comfortable" when doing research prior to the class. Some of the reasons why they did not feel confident had to do with their lack of knowledge about services, tools, and databases; for example, services like interlibrary loan, the use of subject or LibGuides, and the legitimacy of Google Scholar. Since Google's search engine is a commercial platform, students did not know that they could find reliable resources there. Students also discovered that using Google Scholar in tandem with the library's databases could be highly effective and efficient. Many students reported not having been aware of LibGuides. However, when they began to take classes in other departments due to the interdisciplinarity of their degree program, they continued to use LibGuides after the research methods class was over. Other students commented on how their exposure to new databases broadened their options when doing research. As a result of including a librarian in the class, many students became knowledgeable of the various services the libraries had to offer. One service that students discovered during this methods class was interlibrary loan. Through later interactions with students as they worked to complete their Master's theses, it became apparent how interlibrary loan empowered them to successfully complete their exhaustive research.

Though there was an improvement in their research abilities and confidence after taking the class, it is important to highlight that this was not the case for all students. Some felt that they were doing a good job at locating the sources they needed for their projects prior to the class, thus reporting that there was not much more to be learned in the course. Most students felt more

confident doing research but those who did not at least learned where they could get the help they needed.

Conclusion

Embedded librarianship is much more than the latest buzzword in the library community. The benefit and long-lasting effects are tangible and measurable. The presence of a librarian in a classroom can help create a relationship with the students similar to the ones they have with their professors. The benefits of such a relationship become clearer when we see that students are more likely to ask an instructor than a librarian for help finding books or journal articles (Mazurkiewicz and Potts 2007, 168). The overlap in instructor and librarian roles makes it possible for some students to continue visiting the librarian for help with their research, even after the class is over. The students come to value the librarian as a resource and continue to seek his or her assistance throughout their program. In general "students are more willing to seek help when they know a librarian is an integral part of the class" (Becker 2010, 238). This is evidence that librarians need to continue to reach out to the students and faculty beyond our offices. However, it is also important to keep scalability in mind. The time commitment of an embedded librarian is far greater than what's needed for a one-shot session of instruction. Librarians are assigned to multiple subjects with dozens of faculty and hundreds of students to work with. This means that it is simply impossible to provide the same level of service to all of them. A class on research methods or a thesis seminar is an ideal option to maximize our impact on student learning.

Suggestions for Future Embedded Librarians

The following suggestions are based on my experiences:

1. Be proactive. Propose a collaboration of embedded librarianship to a receptive faculty member. Though the faculty makes many of the decisions regarding how and when librarians teach information literacy, you can still suggest how you can be most useful to them.

2. Familiarize yourself with students' class research interests/projects. Rather than starting from scratch, this will save you time when you provide guidance on locating their topical information. Take notes from the classes you attend.

3. Do not be afraid to ask the teaching faculty for more class time. Though being an embedded librarian signifies being more involved in the class, it does not mean that you have to fit a complex lesson into one session because the syllabus says that you are only teaching one day. Talk to the faculty with whom you collaborate, and estimate how much time is needed to cover the necessary material. After all, they want you in their classroom.

4. Ask students and faculty for feedback on how to improve the class. This will improve your relationship with them and, in turn, your teaching strategies.

5. Be flexible with your time. Despite the fact that you are not grading them, students will view you as an authority figure and thus seek your advice during the semester. For example, they will come for help at the last minute, or ask questions after class.

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