

12-29-2006

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Recommended Citation

Nickel, Lisa T., "Collaborating with Faculty and Instructional Technology Staff" (2006). *W&M Libraries Book Chapters*. 3.

<https://scholarworks.wm.edu/librariesbookchapters/3>

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**▶ Going the Distance:
Library Instruction for
Remote Learners**

Edited by
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Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc.
New York London

Published by Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc.
100 William Street, Suite 2004
New York, NY 10038-4512

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Printed and bound in the United States of America.

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

ISBN-13: 978-1-55570-592-3

ISBN-10: 1-55570-592-8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Going the distance : library instruction for remote learners / edited by
Susan J. Clayton

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-55570-592-8 (alk. paper)

1. Libraries and distance education. 2. Library orientation. 3. Web-based instruction. I. Clayton, Susan J.

Z718.85.G65 2007

025.5—dc22

2006033013

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COLLABORATING WITH FACULTY AND INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY STAFF

LISA T. NICKEL

Overview: This chapter presents an exploration of faculty, instructional technology staff, and librarian collaboration. It suggests ways to find faculty and IT staff who are interested in collaborating. The chapter also recommends ways for librarians to become involved as participants in online courses. The author presents a thoughtful and practical approach to productive collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout this book, there is much discussion about the importance of library instruction for distance learners, frequently focusing on their specific needs and circumstances. As a result we can see that distance learners, especially, need to be taught the information literacy skills they need in an environment in which those skills are directly applicable. As librarians we need to work with teaching faculty and instructional designers in order to secure a prominent (or at least visible) position on students' radar screens.

Collaboration and cooperation between teaching faculty and librarians in information literacy instruction is not just a good idea—it is a necessity. We live in a world where information is rapidly created, constantly changing, and readily accessed. The library's role in the digital age continues to evolve as more and more information is available outside of our domain. Boundaries are blurring all across campus as we realize that blending content, technology, and information makes for a better overall educational experience. The problems occur for our students when the information that they access is not appropriate, or complete; when they do not know the primary research resources for their field; when their literature reviews turn up only articles found via Google or another search engine. Librarians and faculty must collaborate in order to integrate information literacy

skills into the curriculum and work together to promote learning and increase student success.

METHODS

Finding a partner in collaboration can be the most difficult part of your enterprise. If you do not currently have a teaching faculty member to work with, think about approaching someone with whom you have worked before, possibly teaching a library research class for their students or even serving on a committee together. You can also approach new faculty members, who are just planning their courses and therefore may be open to exploring options for collaboration. Explain the benefits of incorporating a library component to their courses: information-literate students produce better work, learn skills that they can transfer to their other classes, and contribute higher quality research to the college or university as a whole. Another way to get buy-in from faculty is to cultivate “champions” in each department and have them spread the word about your successful past partnerships. Department faculty tend to pay attention to colleagues in their own area who have success stories to share. Finally, creating a sample course in WebCT, Blackboard, or whichever course management system your institution uses, that has embedded library resources in it may encourage faculty to get involved in a partnership with you—this way, they can see firsthand the value that can be added to a course through cooperation with the library.

COMMUNICATION

Communication is the key to most successful endeavors, and collaborating for information literacy is no different. True collaboration is based on uniting the strengths of each partner to create an environment where the content, information, and technology blend to create a cohesive learning situation for our students. It also involves working together to achieve the same goals. Discussing the goals for the course and finding a shared vision ensures that your hard work will pay off with a meaningful end product. Some steps towards good communication include discussing ground rules and defining the scope of involvement for everyone.

Carefully defined roles can eliminate confusion and structure the workflow. Issues for librarians to consider are: Will you be an actual partner in the class? Is it possible for you to team teach some sections or even create your own content? Or does the teaching faculty member envision you as a cooperative ally, supporting the needs of the class, but not as an independent facilitator? If your role is that of a guest in the class, you need to delineate which activities are appropriate for you to conduct within the course or course management system. For instance, can you create a distinct library section and control all of the content in there? Can you

start discussions or contribute to discussion topics? What about assignments and quizzes? They can be very helpful when assessing the success of your collaboration, but they have larger implications. A quiz or graded assignment will affect the students' overall grade and needs to be factored in before the class begins.

Many of the same issues will apply to the instructional designers with whom you work. Are they partners, helping to plan the course and delivery, or will they function more as translators, facilitating the move from in-person to online class? Often, instructional designers are simply seen as the “gatekeepers” to course management systems, but they are so much more than that. In many ways, librarians and instructional designers have the same issues with regard to their status on campus. Many faculty members do not fully understand either our training or our expertise. Admittedly, librarians do not always understand what it is that instructional designers do, either. Depending on their educational background, instructional designers can be technology specialists, have pedagogical expertise, and add great value to online learning.

Good pedagogy implies that the instructor can develop targeted learning objectives. Online instruction is more than a series of readings posted to a Web site; it requires deliberate instructional design that hinges on linking learning objectives to specific learning activities and measurable outcomes. Few faculty members have had formal education or training in instructional design or learning theory. To expect them to master the instructional design needed to put a well-designed course online is probably unrealistic. A more effective model is to pair a faculty member with an instructional designer so that each brings unique skills to the course-creation process. (Oblinger and Hawkins, 2005)

And since librarians can contribute their own unique skill set, a collaboration including all three is a recipe for success.

PLANNING

Planning is essential for success when collaborating with faculty and instructional designers. Getting involved in planning the learning objectives for a particular course as early as possible is always recommended. If that is not possible, try to become involved soon after the course is designed. If your institution has defined information literacy outcomes and objectives, your job can be easier. If it does not, you can still use and refer your partners to the ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* and work together to integrate your learning objectives with theirs. Once the objectives have been decided, there are many decisions that need to be made, among them: What content is going to be included? Who is responsible for completing each of the different sections? Which delivery method is appropriate to each concept? And how will the material be integrated into the course or assignment? Instructional designers can be especially

helpful here. If they are experienced, they will be able to draw upon previous work to relate which methods have proven successful for them in the past. They will also be able to educate you about which formats lend themselves well to certain topics/objectives. Use this opportunity to try out new and different technologies or methods that they recommend. Innovation comes from trial and error.

Another important part of the planning is the give and take in finding out what library experiences the instructor has been pleased with in the past and what the problem areas were for their previous students or classes. Share the methods that you have found to be successful and explain how these methods could apply or be used to assist their current students. Discuss which strategies you will implement in order to reinforce your key concepts and create assignments that require students to use library research skills to enhance their work. Brainstorm ways to address all of the aforementioned issues and include everyone involved in the discussion.

CHALLENGES

When working on your project with the faculty and instructional designers, be especially aware of using library jargon. Oftentimes, despite our best efforts, we tend to use terminology that is confusing or misunderstood by others. Refer to John Kupersmith's *Library Terms that Users Understand*, where he suggests not using acronyms and using natural language equivalents. For instance, instead of "inter-library loan" try "borrowing from other libraries" or instead of referring to your OPAC with a nickname, or saying "periodical indexes," use target words in your descriptions, like "find books" or "search for articles" (Kupersmith, 2006). Once your content is complete, it is often helpful to have the instructional designer look over your written/posted documents and identify problem terminology. Remember to ensure consistency by checking all of the library terminology against the assignment directions from the teaching faculty member and any by the instructional designer. At the same time, make sure that you understand the terms that the designer and instructor use; speak up to clarify that which you find unclear. Summarizing all of your meetings via e-mail is always a good idea and lessens confusion as you move ahead.

EXAMPLES

Depending on the mode of instruction for the distance learners that you assist, there are many options for successful collaboration. The specific "classroom" examples in this chapter will deal primarily with *online* distance learning, using various course management systems, such as Blackboard, WebCT, ANGEL, Desire2Learn, Moodle, and so forth. Most of the practices, however, are applicable to any type of library instruction for distance learners.

Working in most course management systems requires you to have access to individual courses with a login name and password. There are different account designations that grant you the ability to view grades, add or change content, post announcements, begin or contribute to discussion boards, create quizzes, and so forth. Some of the various designations are: developer, designer, and teaching assistant (TA). You may be limited to a particular designation depending on the policies of your institution or the instructional technology department and, of course, based on the agreement between you and the teaching faculty member. If you are not granted a login or permission to create course content within the course management system, start small. Create the materials and have the faculty member or instructional designer add them to the course. Some seemingly small contributions, such as adding a link to the library or electronic course readings or including library research guides into the course, can be a very big step to some faculty members. You can also gain experience to build upon and work for change, gradually building up the trust between you and your faculty partner. The more successful collaborations you have can provide you with arguments to change some minds and policies.

Instructional designers often create and hold classes where they instruct the teaching faculty in creating and designing their online courses. Initiate collaboration with the designers for you to add a library component to the training: showcase different options for librarian–faculty–instructional designer collaboration in their courses. Try creating a repository of learning objects that faculty members can incorporate into their online courses a la carte. Include items such as remote access instructions, subject-specific research guides, online streaming tutorials, and sample library research assignments. Allowing the instructors to pick and choose and customize the library resources that they want to add to their course can create a feeling of self-efficacy for them.

If you are able to work directly with the teaching faculty and designers in creating content for the course, some examples of activities used to enhance and incorporate library instruction into the curriculum are:

- *Student Research Logs*: Students detail what research activities they engaged in for research assignments. Include detailed questions for students to respond to, such as: What is the resource name? What is the student's evaluation of the resource? What, if any information gathered from that resource is useful? What is the student's rating of the usefulness of the resource for his or her work? Provide feedback to the student by suggesting alternative sources or commenting on the appropriateness of the information gathered to the assignment.
- *Bibliographies*: Students create a bibliography of sources used for their research. Librarian checks or "signs off" on the sources, ensuring that they are acceptable according to what has been agreed upon by the instructor and librarian for the assignment.

- ▶ *Online Discussion Boards*: Create a library or research discussion board where students can ask library-related questions or get advice from the librarian on research strategies.
- ▶ *Virtual Reference Service*: Offer online reference service, via synchronous chat, instant messenger (IM), or e-mail.
- ▶ *Online "Office Hours"*: Librarians post times that they will be available live (online) to answer student inquiries, via either discussion boards, chat, or possibly video conferencing.

CONCLUSION

The collaborative opportunities possible among teaching faculty members, librarians, and instructional designers are as abundant as your imagination and creativity. Remember to be flexible, respect your partners' expertise, and embrace all opportunities for collaboration.

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