

Research across the curriculum

By Steve McKinzie

Why we should teach research like we teach writing

For most libraries, and for the vast majority of librarians, teaching research is a piecemeal, truncated affair. Whatever we call our efforts—bibliographic instruction, information literacy, research instruction, or what have you—we do far too little of it (if we are genuinely honest with ourselves), and we do it in isolation of the larger concerns of the curriculum. A persistent malaise of ineffectiveness and confusion lies beneath the general self-congratulatory nature of much of discussions about our professional librarian instruction. It is painfully obvious that we desperately need to reevaluate our teaching. Now more than ever, we should begin to develop a comprehensive, far-reaching approach to instruction. We should, in effect, teach research like universities and colleges already have been teaching writing: across and throughout the curriculum.

On the whole, librarians have made solid inroads into the generally information-darkened corridors of academe. We have freshman seminars with research components, upper-level courses with instruction about the library built right into the syllabus, and regular instructional offerings in 100-level courses in a variety of disciplines. In broad terms, such instructions have been enormously positive and genuinely beneficial, a general boon to the republic, a sustained enlightenment to its citizens.

But let's be honest. Much of this wonderful instruction is also sporadic and notoriously ineffective. We teach (if we teach at all) in most instances by invitation only. Faculty can request or refuse it, depending on their fancy, interests, or biases. They can also ignore it completely (the likely situation in more institutions

that most of us would like to admit). And even in the best of places where the library's instructional program garnishes the envy of colleagues or the praise of evaluating boards, most of us have to concede that our most successful efforts rarely equip students to become effective researchers. The best students forget much of what the librarian covers in the one-hour class demonstration; our instruction is rarely reinforced by the student's later experience of actually locating information. And the most energetic and effective librarian can merely introduce students to one or several aspects of the research process in the single 50-minute slot usually allotted to research discussions.

Like the old freshman composition course that was supposed to teach students everything they needed to know about writing, our present one-shot BI sessions are supposed to equip students to handle all the intricacies of the information age. Most colleges and universities have long since thrown out the freshman composition course—not because students never learned anything in such courses, but because they could learn far more with a more comprehensive approach. "Writing across the curriculum" and "writing-intensive" courses have replaced the older isolated type of writing instruction. Such approaches take seriously the complicated dimensions of writing and the complexities of learning.

The present piecemeal, get-it-in-the-freshman-year, one-shot BI instruction deserves a jettisoning similar to that given to the old freshman comp course. Our views about teaching research (a complicated and delicate skill) should mirror what we've already learned about teaching writing: that it requires more than a single session or a single course. It demands intensive, thorough, and dedicated application over the entirety of a student's academic ca-

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can substantiate statements in your cover letter and resume. Supply them with an up-to-date copy of your resume, copies of the announcements of positions for which you are applying, and the cover letters you are writing. It is best to select references who can comment specifically on the required and desirable aspects of the position.

Include your direct supervisor as a reference, if possible. It is understandable that this may not be comfortable for you at the onset of the application process, but keep in mind that if you are being seriously considered for a position, a reference from your supervisor may be required.

D. Formatting the documents. Use a laser printer if at all possible. It is no longer necessary to get your resume typeset to make it look professionally done. Do not try to cram everything into the cover letter and resume by using small print and narrow margins. The appearance of these documents is almost as important as their content.

Affirmative action provisions

It is appropriate not to supply race, age, religion, marital status, and other information that is not to be used in hiring decisions. Do, however, fill out any affirmative action forms that are sent to you and submit them as directed. Most public colleges and universities particularly encourage women, ethnic minorities, disabled persons, and veterans to apply for their positions.

Conclusion

All of the areas we have discussed here address the problems we have found with applications we've received. It is much easier to give serious consideration to a clear, well-organized, well-written, complete dossier than to take the time to sort through a messy and poorly prepared one. Your chances of being considered for an interview will increase greatly by taking the application process seriously and tailoring your application to the position requirements. ■

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reer. There should be a research dimension (a genuine and in-depth explanation on how to locate and critically evaluate resources) in a host of classes and throughout the academy's disciplines.

Such a restructuring of our approach—a commitment to teaching research in much the same way progressive institutions already teach writing—wouldn't immediately bring a radical and revolutionary change. But it could mean the beginning of a new way of looking at research and research skills in the totality of the educational enterprise. At the very least, colleges and universities might add a skilled familiarity with research and information retrieval to the litany of competencies and skills they require of their graduates. Deans might begin to scrutinize a departmental major in light of its commitment to quality student research as much as the department's teaching accomplishments or breadth of course coverage. Outside evaluating boards might even start to ask pointed and perhaps embarrassing questions about the kinds of steps the institution is taking to equip its students for the information age. And perhaps most importantly of all, librarians equipped with a more comprehensive, holistic vision of their own role in the educational enterprise

could really begin to engage students in the wonders of scholarly research and to empower students to function in the increasingly complex, if troublesome, information era.

Like writing, research merits a more thorough and comprehensive commitment. Colleges and universities have to replace their present well-intentioned approach to research instruction with a sustained, comprehensive vision—one that teaches research skills in a variety of classes and contexts. For today's academic climate, the old *we-are-there-when-ever-you-need-us* BI approach is just too ineffective and truncated.

The importance of knowing how to tap into the world of information, of engaging oneself in the world of scholarly conversation, and of learning how to critically evaluate the conflicting arguments and claims of varied sources cannot be overestimated. And it can't be left to happenstance. Such skills have to be taught, and taught by those who know most about them. Just as higher education has had the courage to tackle the problem of writing aggressively, colleges and universities should now address the coming demands of the information age. It's time we taught research across and throughout the curriculum. ■