Fast and furious: A weekend session in bibliographic instruction

By Claudia A. Baldwin

California State University
Dominguez Hills

A concentrated BI laboratory at Dominguez Hills.

California State University, Dominguez Hills bills itself as an urban institution which provides "a unique and attractive alternative to other, much larger or more expensive universities in the Los Angeles area." One characteristic that makes us unique is that nearly forty percent of our students complete their degree requirements at night and on weekends.

For many of the University's undergraduates, Library Skills and Strategies is a required two-unit course. Because of the special needs of our student body, I have been experimenting with teaching the course over two weekends. Instead of ten class meetings of one hour and forty minutes each, my section (one of four offered each quarter) is scheduled to meet 9 to 5 on Saturday, 1 to 5 on Sunday, and 9 to 5 on the following Saturday. One would think that no student in his right mind would be willing to spend an entire weekend learning about the library, but each time my weekend course is offered I have to turn people away in order to keep the enrollment under thirty.

I face a real challenge of trying to hold the students' attention for an eight-hour stand. Needless to say, I can't lecture for eight hours any more than they can listen for eight hours. What I do is structure the course with units (the card catalog, encyclopedias, indexes, etc.) and I lecture on each topic from sixty to ninety minutes. This is followed by a lab assignment which immediately reinforces what they've just learned. The entire class works on the assignment in the library with my assistance.

One assignment works especially well in this marathon setting, because it takes several hours to complete. After explaining the scope and arrangement of about thirty ready reference sources, I divide the class into groups of five and divide the reference books into as many groups. The class then has the responsibility to answer fifty picayune questions. Every twenty minutes I rotate the books so that everyone has a chance to see them. Since working in groups adds a little competition to the scavenger hunt, the students get so involved I have to force them out at five o'clock. This method solves several problems normally associated with your typical scavenger hunt reference assignment. The books are there in the classroom, so there's no frustration trying to find them on the shelf; everyone has equal time to see every book; and it doesn't matter if students give answers to their classmates, because the group is encouraged to work together.

Grades are based primarily on individual projects which are turned in a month later. This final assignment always involves tying together everything learned in the 2 day session. For example, I might have them demonstrate their knowledge of search strategy by researching a topic of their choice.

I see some definite disadvantages with the marathon method. It's hard for some students to absorb so much in so little time. Slower students do not surface in time to receive extra help. I'm available

for help after the course is over, but most students complete their final assignment on their own even though they may suddenly realize that it didn't all sink in. I also have a problem squeezing the same amount of material into the compact time span. Somehow we always seem rushed at the end.

I think, though, that the many advantages outweigh the disadvantages. Students can take a library skills course without it interfering with their regular classload. They perceive it as relatively painless since it's over too quickly for boredom to set in. Because the course is always scheduled the first two weekends of the quarter, many students find that they can use their new skills for other classes later in the same quarter. Best of all, there's a greater opportunity to experiment. An eight-hour chunk can be divided in many more ways than ten ninety-minute pieces. If I want to spend three hours on a particular concept, no problem. The possibilities for different conceptual models and activities are endless. Indeed, 70 percent of the students agree that they would like to take another course scheduled at the same time.

If now you think you might also try a weekend marathon, here's my advice. 1) Schedule it early in the quarter/semester before students are too bogged down in other classes. 2) Keep the class as small as possible if everyone will be working on the same assignment at the same time. 3) Be prepared to devote your entire life to BI for two solid weeks. ■■

Kirk honored as first BI librarian of the year

Thomas Kirk, director of the Hutchins Library at Berea College, Kentucky, has been named the first recipient of the Miriam Dudley BI Librarian of the Year Award for 1984. Kirk will be presented with the award at the Bibliographic Instruction Section's program meeting on Tuesday, June 26, 2:00–5:30 p.m.

The Miriam Dudley Award consists of $1,000 presented to a librarian who has made an especially significant contribution to the advancement of bibliographic instruction. It honors Miriam Dudley, reference librarian at the University of California, Los Angeles, whose pioneering efforts in the field of bibliographic instruction led to the formation of the Bibliographic Instruction Section. The award has been funded by Mountainside Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Thomas Kirk

Nominees should have achieved distinction in such areas as planning and implementation of a bibliographic instruction program that has served as a model for other programs; development of courses on bibliographic instruction in ALA-accredited library schools, or development of BI continuing education courses that have served as models for other courses; research and publication that has had a demonstrable impact on the concepts and methods of teaching bibliography; and active participation in organizations devoted to the promotion and enhancement of bibliographic instruction.

The deadline for nominations in letter form for the 1985 award is December 1, 1984. Send nominations to Mary Reichel, Head, Reference Department, Pullen Library, Georgia State University, 100 Decatur St., S.E., Atlanta, GA 30303. ■■

The Information Age at last

A bomb threat sent online by someone using the University of California's online public catalog, MELVYL, resulted in the evacuation of the UC-San Diego Library early in March. The threat, which contained derogatory remarks about the library staff as well as the ominous promise that a bomb would be set off in the library the next day, was input from a public terminal that employs a "comments" command, which the library uses for feedback on their automated system.

All "comments" from the public are transmitted to the University of California's Division of Library Automation located in Berkeley, where they are stored and reviewed periodically. As luck would have it, the comments were reviewed the very morning after the bomb message was sent. The Berkeley automation staff quickly notified the UC-San Diego Library administration, who made the decision to evacuate.

About 300 people were evacuated for three hours while a deputy sheriff with a bomb-sniffing dog searched the building. No explosives were found.

The "comments" command has been disabled temporarily to discourage copycat false alarms. However, the library plans to reinstate it with an added explanation to MELVYL users that all comments are reviewed only once every one or two weeks at automation headquarters at Berkeley, and not at each of the nine UC System campuses.