

Part-time library school faculty, full-time librarians

An opportunity for continuing education

by Ellen A. Keith and Trudi E. Jacobson

Continuing education is a hot topic among reference and instruction librarians. We attend national and local conferences and workshops and form regional or local groups so that we may stay current in our field, brainstorm with our colleagues, and develop our skills. The authors propose an additional means of continuing education: teaching a course in a graduate school of library and information science (LIS). This activity not only benefits the librarian but also the graduate students and the graduate schools.

Background

Our full-time jobs are as reference and instruction librarians at academic institutions. We work at the reference desk, instructing students one-on-one, and teach information literacy concepts and research skills to undergraduate and graduate students in one-shot library instruction sessions. However, as all instruction librarians know, the one-shot leaves a lot to be desired. We wanted more time with our students to measure their progress and to assess the results of our teaching. We welcomed the chance to become adjunct faculty in LIS schools.

Our part-time jobs

We recognize that this opportunity for con-

tinuing education is only available when there is a nearby graduate LIS school. The authors are fortunate enough to have such schools in the vicinity, Dominican University and the University at Albany. These schools, like almost any institution, tend to rely on adjunct faculty, so we all gain from the exchange.

We teach Reference and Online Services, Library User Instruction, and User Education: Theory and Techniques, and, as practitioners in the field, we feel that we bring valuable, practical experience to the classroom.

Commitment

Whether teaching in another institution or teaching in the graduate school of our own institution, taking on a semester-long class is a serious commitment. Librarians who wish to become adjunct faculty must keep the responsibilities in mind: committing to one night a week for the duration of a semester (that may not run concurrently with your own), preparing lesson plans, lectures, class discussions, and assignments, being available to students via e-mail, phone, and office hours, grading homework, and all the while, working your full-time job. That said, the authors agree that the rewards are tremendous. But because of the time commitment, one author has decided to limit her graduate teaching to one semester per year.

About the authors

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Teaching at another institution

What are the advantages and disadvantages to teaching at another institution? It's easy to point out the disadvantages. While teaching a reference class or an instruction class, you can't have the students sit in with you at the reference desk or observe your instruction session or a co-worker's session. Everything related to your class is housed at another library. There are also advantages to be found from this situation. You have affiliation with another institution, providing contact with another group of librarians and faculty and a different collection.

Although adjunct faculty can feel marginalized and out of the loop, efforts may be made to counteract this. The dean at Dominican's library school makes a point of having a meeting of part-time faculty once a semester. Adjunct faculty members feel like a part of the institution and are kept up-to-date on initiatives. And, although the non-affiliation with the LIS school's library can be a hindrance, it can also be a benefit.

Coauthor Ellen Keith, in both her reference and user instruction classes, makes frequent reference to real-life scenarios she has encountered in her full-time employment, some of them examples of what not to do at the reference desk or in the classroom. As they are examples from her workplace, they do not focus upon the librarians the students will encounter at the institution's library.

Teaching at one's own institution

A key benefit for Jacobson, who teaches at her own institution, is the degree of contact she has with some of the students in her course. While she does not work at the library that supports graduate students at the School of Information Science and Policy, these students often work on assignments at the main library. She has been able to help them at the reference desk or can chat with them when encountering them in the library. Students also feel that their instructor is easily available to them outside of class time.

In addition, some of the students have been graduate assistants or employees of the reference department at the main library over the years. Coauthor Trudi Jacobson has worked at the reference desk with them, in the process obtaining a fuller view of them than might occur in the classroom setting.

One of the reasons for taking on a semester-long class of LIS students is the opportunity to teach more and in greater depth.

One aspect of the dual role has both beneficial and disadvantageous sides. Jacobson also describes a number of actual instruction situations as examples. Naturally, many of the situations are drawn from her own experiences at the institution where she works and where the students are enrolled. The advantage is that students are often familiar with campus initiatives that lie behind some of the examples. The disadvantage is that they may also be familiar with the people involved, even though they are presented anonymously, or may be able to put two and two together too easily. This requires that the instructor walk a fine line between providing both positive and negative examples that may illuminate theory and not slip into tale-telling and possible cynicism.

Student and instructor expectations

One of the reasons for taking on a semester-long class of LIS students is the opportunity to teach more and in greater depth. In the traditional one-shot session with undergraduate students, instruction librarians have to hold back. We're not teaching them to be librarians, so, tempted as we may be to tell them everything we know about libraries and research, that wouldn't be effective. But, our graduate students are being educated to be library and information professionals, so we feel free to tell them everything we know.

We need to remember that similarities between graduates and undergraduates exist. Graduate students are not yet conversant with all library jargon. On the first night of Keith's class in Library User Instruction, one student finally interrupted her to ask what was this "BI" to which she kept referring. We can use jargon with our graduate students (they will encounter it), but we must remember to define it and caution them about using it with patrons.

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As with our undergraduate students, examples need to be placed in context for our graduate students. Yes, they need to learn the variety of reference sources, but they also want to know which sources you use the most and what you think of online reference sources versus print sources, among other issues.

We expect more from our graduate students than our undergraduates, including a greater attention to detail and a greater interest in inquiry, which is really what librarianship is all about. Keith's latest semester of graduate students was a group of good listeners and good questioners.

At times, Keith did not have answers to all their questions and had to promise the answers at the next class. At one point, she realized that they were learning the skills to find the answers themselves and so she included one of their latest questions in their homework.

When the class saw it, there was a bit of surprise—isn't this the question they had asked her?—but they took it in stride and all answered it correctly. It's important to remember that they are being educated to be the librarian's peers, and as much as we want to share everything that we know, part of that is teaching the process so they have the ability to ultimately answer their own questions.

When Keith has been disappointed with a class, the frustration has been with students who are not interested in the process and do not see how it will relate to anything they are or will be doing.

Continuing education benefits

Teaching an LIS course is a unique continuing education experience. First, the librarian gets paid for the education rather than the other way around. Second, almost every class period with the graduate students provides an opportunity to rethink ways in which we

do our full-time job or a reminder of what we need to focus on in those jobs.

• **Teaching reference.** When Keith teaches the reference interview, the ensuing class discussion reinforces its importance, reminding her that a straightforward question is not always straightforward, which makes her more alert to the interview at her reference desk. In addition, reference sources on the syllabus include some that may be otherwise overlooked on the job. Teaching graduate students reference skills and reference philosophy while working as a reference librarian fosters the instructor-librarian's own skills and philosophy. It calls us to account, explaining to future librarians why and how we do what we do.

• **Teaching user education.** Teaching students how to teach forces us to think more carefully and clearly about our own teaching: we start to see ourselves through our students' eyes. Are we good role models? Do we teach as we are teaching them to teach? Our graduate students can make a very informed judgment about our teaching abilities, since we are doing it in front of them week after week. We are also forced to confront what we are doing in our traditional instruction sessions. If we teach our graduate students to set goals and objectives for instruction, can we honestly say we do this for our own classes?

Our students sometimes ask us questions that cause us to really think about a topic, or delve into the literature, in order to respond. We need to stay current with the literature and key resources in the field, so our assigned readings and our lessons are up-to-date. Along with all the time commitments of our primary job and our teaching responsibilities, this can place great demands upon our time, but it also keeps us on our toes, energizes us, and makes us better at our primary jobs.

Expanded teaching styles

Teaching graduate students on a weekly basis allows us to expand our range of teaching styles. We are consistently able to use methods that encourage students to take more responsibility for their own learning, such as group work, role-playing, and discussions. These methods tend to be more successful

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As a result of UMD's Mardigian Library's Project, our target group, OIR, was better educated about the availability and reliability of library information services, and gained easier access to the information they needed. Library outreach projects such as this enhance library services to all potential user groups, promote cooperative relationships between campus communities, and ultimately benefit the whole university.

Notes

1. *Library Literature* (Bornx: H.W. Wilson, 1984-)

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with students at this educational level than they are with undergraduates. In addition, we have time to accustom them to such methods over the course of the semester. Initial resistance usually crumbles as students understand the effectiveness of these methods and as we set the tone for the class such that students feel more comfortable with their classmates.

Assignments

Assignments need to be a mix of the theoretical and the practical, readings, and activities or exercises. Graduate students can be given fairly heavy reading loads, and as long as they are being held accountable in some way, they will come to class prepared. They often become very engaged with the readings, and adding one or two controversial sources to the syllabus can lead to lively discussions. As with any graduate program of study, they need to understand the theory behind the practice and the concepts that currently guide the profession. They also need assignments that will prepare them for what they will be asked to do on the job; assignments like preparing a lesson plan for an instruction session or writing an Internet use policy.

Benefits to our students

While we believe that teaching part-time provides us with immense professional benefits, we think it also benefits our students. Brundin reported on a study of Canadian library school faculty conducted in 1979. "For many educators practical experience was a strong factor in establishing their credibility with their students as well as colleagues in the field."¹

2. Scott Nicholson, "A proposal for categorization and nomenclature for Web search tools," *Journal of Internet Cataloging* 2, 3/4 (2000): 9.

3. Those interested in Web site design should see Kristen L. Garlock and Sherry Piontech, *Designing Web interfaces to library services and resources* (Chicago: American Library Association 1999).

4. Stephen Markel, *Marketing the library* (1996). Available at http://www-personal.si.umich.edu/~smarkel/papers/misc/marketing_libraries.html. ■

Brundin also said, "Librarianship is a people-oriented profession; we are concerned with users and with service to the users. We teach our students concepts and techniques, but do we effectively prepare them to use these concepts and techniques in the working library world with real library patrons."²

Students in LIS programs cannot do without the theory that they learn from their full-time instructors. But we are able to provide, in one or two of their courses, the perspective of what goes on in an actual library, with the problems and challenges and successes that we encounter daily. We have encouraged our students to keep in touch with us, and when they do, we have been delighted to hear, "Your class prepared me well."

Contact your library school

Teaching these courses has furthered our professional development, provided continuing education, and given us the opportunity to educate future librarians. We have only benefited from the experience, and so we encourage librarians to avail themselves of this chance. If you work at an institution with a graduate LIS school or have such a school in your area, contact the dean to inquire about becoming an adjunct faculty member. The opportunity to teach future members of our profession provides a win-win situation for both the students and for us, and is not to be missed!

Notes

1. Robert E. Brundin, "Field experience and the library educator," *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 31 (1991): 366.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 367. ■