

Bonnie W. Oldham and Diane Skorina

# Librarians and instructional technologists collaborate

## Working together for student success

Collaboration is an essential part of any librarian's job. Librarians have always had to work with each other and with faculty members, administrators, and technology support staff. As more institutions hire instructional technologists with design experience and technology expertise, librarians can forge particularly fruitful collaborations with them, as well. Like librarians, instructional technologists are often tasked with addressing plagiarism, academic integrity, information literacy skills, and with using Web-based technologies to communicate with and engage students and faculty members.

The authors of this article are academic librarians, one at a small institution and one at a medium-sized institution, who met when they presented at the Pennsylvania Library Association Conference on how each collaborated with instructional technologists. After the presentation, Bonnie Oldham, public services librarian at the University of Scranton's Weinberg Memorial Library, and Diane Skorina, reference and instruction librarian at Ursinus College's Myrin Library, compared the different approaches taken at their respective Pennsylvania schools.

University of Scranton is a Masters I university with a student population of approximately 5,700, including undergraduate, graduate, and part-time students located in Scranton, Pennsylvania. At the university, instructional technologists offer their services through the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence (CTLE). The creation of CTLE merged what had

been the Learning Resource Center, the Office of Instructional Development, and the Institutional Technologies Center. Its director reports organizationally to the dean of the Weinberg Library. With a mission that states, "*In collaboration with the Library*, the CTLE works with faculty and students to help create an environment that encourages and supports student learning, faculty enrichment, instructional design, and the use of technology," the relationship between CTLE and the Weinberg Library is a formal, structured approach to collaboration through its reporting structure and its shared vision. The scope of CTLE is also broader than instructional technology alone.

At Ursinus, a small private liberal arts college with an enrollment of 1,680 undergraduate students located in the suburbs of Philadelphia, the IT-librarian collaboration has developed from the bottom up rather than from an institutional mandate as it has at the University of Scranton. However, while the development and maintenance of the partnership are self-directed, the collaborative work between the instructional technologists and the librarian has been no less important to the academic life of the students on campus. Indeed, with a staff of only two and one-half librarians to serve its entire student body and all faculty

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members, basic library necessities such as surveys, virtual library orientation, and efforts to address the needs of information literacy would not be possible without this cross-departmental partnership. As Mark Cain wrote in 2003, “Librarians and technologists are becoming increasingly interdependent, so to achieve their goals they must cooperate.”<sup>1</sup> This is true at a small school as much as at a large one.

### **Small institution, informal approach**

When Skorina first joined the staff of the Myrin Library at Ursinus in August 2005, she wanted to create an online survey for faculty, staff, and students to get a better sense of where the library fit within the institution. With a very small library staff and limited resources, the only available assistance was from outside of the library through the IT department, whose instructional technologists, Jean Bennett and Tori Waskiewicz, were willing to help. As the project developed, it became clear that the instructional technologists and the librarian shared many mandates and responsibilities, and thus could tackle more projects together. They started small. The first project was to address the presence of a large Google search box on the main page of Blackboard, Ursinus’s course management system, while the library was not represented at all. To give the library more of a presence in Blackboard, where most students are required to go for their coursework, the instructional technologists and the librarian developed an i-frame (an inline frame that contains another Web document) for the library, which appears in the main part of the Blackboard home page, more prominently located than the Google search box. Now students can query the library catalog (a new window opens up with the search results), link to databases, and get research help from directly within Blackboard.

In the course of developing the i-frame, it became clear that the instructional technology department and the library both

were tasked by the administration with addressing copyright, plagiarism, and academic integrity. In an effort to address these issues and continue to increase the library’s presence in Blackboard, they created a first-year student library orientation as a Blackboard organization, which addressed a third issue: finding new ways to reach first-year students since many of them couldn’t, or simply didn’t, attend the in-person library orientation in August. (Consistently over many years, no matter what enticements are offered, only about one-third of the first-year students show up). The library orientation site was placed on the main Blackboard orientation site that students are required to visit to take placement tests and complete surveys that help choose roommates. They incorporated a “Library vs. Google” tutorial and videos jointly produced by the librarian and the ITs featuring students and professors talking candidly about real issues concerning plagiarism and academic integrity.

Because the IT-librarian collaboration at Ursinus College is bottom up and self-maintained, the instructional technologists meet biweekly with the librarian to brainstorm and discuss current and potential projects. Together, they work to address faculty who are often reluctant to talk about topics such as copyright, plagiarism, and information literacy. This joint approach has made both departments more visible on campus and has strengthened both the instructional technologist’s and the librarian’s abilities to bring up issues of concern to the wider campus community.

### **Medium-sized institution, formal approach**

At the University of Scranton, librarians and CTLE staff in general collaborate in a number of ways. Including the library dean, there are ten full-time and three part-time librarians. Two librarians serve on the CTLE Advisory Group in addition to the library dean being an *ex officio* member. The associate director of CTLE, Eugeniu Grigorescu,

serves on the Library Advisory Committee. Librarians copresent with CTLE staff at new faculty and part-time faculty orientations. Both the library and CTLE publish a newsletter, and we exchange newsletter articles and cooperatively present at faculty enrichment workshops sponsored by CTLE.

As part of an open house held by CTLE to showcase some recently purchased, grant-funded hardware and software, three of the librarians gave presentations on social networking technologies, such as wikis and RSS feeds. Librarians have also partnered with CTLE to produce several major library projects involving technology.

One of these projects involved converting the exercise students take as part of the library component for Computing and Information Literacy (C/IL 102/102L), a course which is required of all students to fulfill the general education curriculum requirements, from a paper format to an electronic format within the Angel course management system. To facilitate this change, the librarians rewrote some of the questions so that all of the questions were in multiple choice format. The combina-

tion of all multiple choice questions and electronic format facilitated the process of assessing student responses. A review of the first post-conversion assessment revealed that some of the questions needed to be revised, and CTLE's associate director together with some of the librarians rewrote some of the questions so that there were plausible distracters and homogenous alternatives.

Another major project undertaken together was the creation of an academic integrity tutorial for undergraduate students that, with permission, was modeled on Georgetown University Library's tutorial. Librarians adapted the content, recruited several students to be photographed for the tutorial, and enlisted faculty from various academic disciplines to contribute photos of themselves along with statements on why academic integrity is important in their fields of study. Grigorescu developed the Web design framework and then supervised the customization process completed by one of the CTLE TechCons. CTLE employs student technical consultants who are savvy with technology and Web-based

### General tips to build strong partnerships

Regardless of school size, the following strategies will help to forge strong IT-librarian collaborative partnerships:

- *Hold frequent in-person meetings.* Meeting in-person, even if only briefly during busy times, is absolutely crucial to continued collaborative efforts.
- *Hold brainstorming sessions.* At least some sessions should be devoted exclusively to brainstorming and exploring new ideas; however, the ideas generated during these brainstorming sessions might not be acted upon until the summer.
- *Employ project planning.* Timelines, deadlines, and clear designation of duties are essential.
- *Work together to address faculty.* Copresenting will reinforce the message.

- *Update each other about developments in the IT and library worlds.* This helps foster better understanding of each others' jobs and spurs the generation of ideas.
- *Be open minded and willing to compromise.*
- *Attend workshops and conferences together.* Instructional technologists should attend librarian conferences, and librarians should attend conferences designed for instructional technologists.
- *Socialize.* Going out to lunch and attending events outside of the professional context helps to maintain a positive working relationship and to cultivate a working friendship.

design as TechCons. They assist faculty members and students with the integration of technology into teaching and learning.

Working with the Systems and Software Resources Department, Grigorescu also facilitated the integration of the tutorial into MyScranton, the university portal, so that when students log into the portal, a link to the tutorial is present if they haven't taken the tutorial. Once the tutorial has been completed, that link no longer appears on the portal page. This system also enables faculty to verify that students in their classes have completed the tutorial. Additionally, administrators can generate a variety of statistics for a specific date range about student participation in the tutorial. Statistics can be gathered by class, college, major, program, class, or course reference number. Thus, the chair of the Biology Department can ascertain how many freshmen who have declared themselves biology majors have completed the tutorial before the first day of the semester.

The successful implementation of the undergraduate tutorial, which went "live" on July 9, 2007, and was completed by 97% of the incoming freshman class, led to the creation of a separate tutorial designed specifically for graduate students at the request of the dean of the management school. The graduate tutorial followed the same basic design as the undergraduate tutorial, but was geared more to the needs of graduate students.

### Future plans

Currently, Skorina, Bennett, and Waskiewicz at Ursinus are working with the director of the Writing Center on the design and development of a one-credit course that incorporates library research skills, instructional technology, and independent cross-disciplinary study. With support from the director of the library, the head of IT, the Writing Center and some faculty members, they are now talking with the Academic Council to get feedback on the feasibility of adding such a course to the curriculum. Though this project

is in its preliminary stages, this team effort has enabled them to jumpstart the discussion of information literacy and technology competency on campus, a conversation that has been difficult for either department to start in isolation.

At the Weinberg Library, Oldham and several other librarians are working with Grigorescu to revise the academic integrity tutorial for undergraduate students. The goal is to make the tutorial less text based by adding photos and short video clips. They are rethinking some of the content so that it more closely reflects the Academic Code of Honesty at the University of Scranton. On the horizon, they have plans to customize the graduate tutorial by specific discipline. To view these tutorials in guest mode, go to the Academic Integrity Web site, which can be found at [www.scranton.edu/academicintegrity](http://www.scranton.edu/academicintegrity).

As librarians and instructional technologists at Mount Holyoke and the University of Massachusetts-Amherst poetically expressed, "librarians, instructional technologists, faculty and students should not plod onwards in isolation."<sup>2</sup> The experience at two different size schools has demonstrated the importance of forging strong partnerships with instructional technologists to collaborate on projects both simple (adding an i-frame to Blackboard) and complex (creating an online academic integrity tutorial). Only through collaboration will librarians and instructional technologists be able to effectively serve the needs of the students and faculty in the 21st-century educational framework in which online elements meld seamlessly with face-to-face teaching and learning.

### Notes

1. Mark Cain, "The Two cultures? Librarians and Technologists," *The Journal of Academic Librarianship* 29, no. 3 (2003): 177–81.
2. Juliet Habjan Boisselle and others, "Talking toward Techno-Pedagogy: IT and Librarian Collaboration—Rethinking Our Roles," *Resource Sharing & Information Networks* 14, no. 1/2 (2004), 123–36. *zc*