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Successful collaboration between learning partners

The small campus experience

Penn State-Fayette, The Eberly Campus is one of 19 commonwealth campuses of The Pennsylvania State University. It is a small and vibrant campus where the goal of student success drives many opportunities for collaboration. During the fall semester of 2013, the Learning and Technological Resources Committee at the Fayette campus discussed ways to promote learning and collaboration among campus learning partners.

As active members of this committee, the library and the learning center brought forth the idea of collaboration between both units. Although the nature of this collaboration had yet to be defined, this was the first time the library and the learning center would collaborate to provide a blended service to students. The learning center coordinator and the reference and instruction librarian decided to experiment with bringing research and writing skills under a single instruction session.

Penn State-Fayette, The Eberly Campus

The Eberly Campus is located between the cities of Uniontown and Connellsville in southwestern Pennsylvania. It is a commuter campus of approximately 800 students, with a mix of traditional, nontraditional, and international students. Penn State-Fayette offers five bachelor degree programs, eight associate degree programs, and the first two years of more than 160 Penn State degrees. The degree programs include nursing, ad-ministration of justice, human development and family studies, psychology, electrical engineering technology, mining technology, business, information sciences and technology, and a physical therapist assistant program.

Planning a team-teaching strategy

In developing their collaboration, both the library and the learning center identified that the process of research and writing is a seamless process in which well-conducted research leads to well-defined ideas, which leads to a well-written paper that includes proper source documentation. Prior to collaborating, each unit would independently visit classes for instruction and lessons about source documentation. Although this process is not ineffective, both units agreed that the expertise of each area could be combined and presented together rather than separately. Both units predicted that presenting research and writing under one course might allow students to make a better connection between the two related processes.

During the early planning stage, the library remarked that during library instruction sessions, students would ask questions regarding source documentation and how to

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properly reflect their research in their writing. Also, when working with students on their papers, the learning center coordinator (also an adjunct instructor for the English department and a writing tutor) often receives research queries from students who often still need to locate further research to incorporate into their papers. While understanding that the expertise of the two can be an opportunity for some cross-training, these experiences further convinced both units of the strength their joint instruction would bring into the classroom.

Although this was the first time both units have worked together in this capacity, other academic libraries and learning and writing centers have collaborated in a similar manner. For example, a review of the literature shows the intersections between both departments go as far back as 20 years. In *Writing Across The Curriculum and the Academic Library,* Jean Sheridan discusses an in depth overview of course design that includes research and writing skills in what looks like an embedded instruction format in the chapter "Making the Connection in the Classroom: A Model for a Library-Based Writing Course."[1] Most recently, in her article "Peering into the Writing Center," Janelle Zauha discusses the importance for information literacy programs and writing centers to understand their common goals as stakeholders in student learning.[2]

With the need to blend research and writing skills in mind, our initial approach to team teaching was a very systematic process:

• The librarian and learning center coordinator prepared necessary material for the instruction session. The material delivered included the use of databases and locating appropriate guides for source documentation.

• The librarian and the learning center coordinator met as needed before the class to review the instruction material.

• On every occasion, the librarian introduced the students to library services and covered course-related databases that included examples of searches. The learning center coordinator discussed learning center resources available to the students and answered questions about student concerns, such as generating ideas, integrating source material into research papers, and documenting sources.

• After the teaching portion, the students used the remaining time for their work. Total instruction time was approximately 50 minutes.

Our experience

During the fall 2013 term, the reference and instruction librarian and learning center coordinator provided information literacy and writing instruction to four sections of CAS 100 (Effective Speech) to show the students the various resources available to them within the library and the learning center. Each 50-minute instruction session included an overview of both areas. More specifically, the librarian covered adequate use of related databases for research, such as Gale Virtual Reference Library, CQ Researcher, and Access World News (NewsBank)—all located under the library's "Try These First" section on the website. The learning center coordinator covered the various services available to students, focusing on what would be most helpful to the students for their particular assignment, including our Online Writing Lab, in the event that students would require help outside of regular learning center hours.

We decided to continue to offer joint instruction in the spring 2014 semester, although we had not begun to market our instruction as a joint effort during this time. During the spring 2014 term, the librarian and learning center coordinator met with four different courses: Management 321(Leadership and Motivation), Nursing 116 (Clinical Immersion Introduction to Concepts of Illness), CAS 100 (Effective Speech), and CAS 250 (Small Group Communication).

With CAS and MGMT 321, we followed a similar format to the instruction we provided during the fall semester. We introduced the students to the many services provided

through the library and the learning center. For MGMT 321, students had an assignment in which they were asked to conduct research in order to generate a five-page paper. Along with basic library resources, such as Gale Virtual Reference Library, students were taught to use the library's discovery tool, LionSearch. Additionally, the learning center coordinator discussed the students' writing concerns, ways the writing tutors can help throughout the assignment, how to request face-to-face and OWL tutoring, and APA and MLA formatting tips. Students were given the opportunity to ask questions and interact with us throughout the presentations.

For NURS 116, both the librarian and learning center coordinator had an opportunity to be more embedded in the course, and this course offered the opportunity to do some informal assessment on the efficacy of the instruction provided. The course instructor sought out the librarian late in the fall 2013 semester to talk about library instruction needs. Students would have an assignment to create a poster that detailed five aspects of a disease/condition. The grading rubric for this course required that students use at least two academic databases taught by the librarian, at least two evidence-based nursing resources also covered during the first instruction session, and proper use of APA citation. The course instructor, librarian, and learning center coordinator agreed on these criteria as fair for grading the students, since their assignment entailed both extensive research and writing.

The librarian first visited the class early in the semester and taught students how to use Nursing Reference Center, Dynamed, and Cochrane Library to get students started with their research topics. The librarian and learning center coordinator then hosted a follow-up instruction/workshop session with the students at the library to work in groups on their posters. Though the follow-up session was more informal, the librarian helped the students find evidence-based research necessary for the assignment, while the learning center coordinator helped students understand and implement APA format. Later in the semester, students returned to the library for a third time in groups to finish their research, create their posters, and prepare for their presentations. During the third session, the learning center coordinator rotated among the groups and helped with poster design and APA format.

On the day of the presentations, the librarian and learning center coordinator were invited to visit the class to view the poster presentations. From viewing the student posters, it was clear that students had the ability to use the databases recommended by the librarian and had properly used APA citation to reference their work.

Short-term outcomes and future goals

Because the joint instruction process was more organic during the first year that both units worked together, no specific criteria were identified in terms of choosing which courses to collaborate on for joint instruction. Rather, both units took the opportunity to team-teach for faculty with whom they already had a positive working relationship. Moving forward, both units will work to develop an organized system of course criteria and marketing of services.

During the 2013-2014 school year, we team-taught a total of ten courses to approximately 194 students. We reached over 20% of our student population in those courses alone. This experience shows the importance of continuing our efforts and demands the need for assessment of future team-taught courses. Building on this new collaboration between the library and the learning center, we aim to foster relationships with additional faculty to engage in more hands-on work with students, similar to the NURS 116 course.

Since this initial collaboration was successful, we plan to implement the following ideas during our continued efforts:

• Market joint instruction services starting fall 2014.

• Develop a general blueprint to follow for every course that will include appropriate learning outcomes, hand-outs for later reference, and class activities for credit.

• Develop specific curriculum that integrates the use of research tools and source documentation by implementing in-class activities where research and source documentation are practiced. We will focus our teaching on becoming more integrated with assignments and overall course objectives, in addition to providing general instruction on library research and source documentation.

• Help the students to achieve specific goals, to become collaborative learners who seek resources, and to acknowledge and practice research and writing as a process.

• Identify specific courses where team-teaching will be most effective.

• Develop plans to establish a more stable instruction classroom during the 2014-2015 school year to improve the library's instruction area for these sessions. More specifically, the campus head librarian has asked us to assess the workshop area and suggest improvements/changes, from furniture to technology and other learning tools.

• Develop an assessment tool to measure the efficacy of our collaboration on student learning outcomes.

The opportunity to bring research and writing skills under a single course can have very positive effects. The goals outlined above will aid us in developing a successful service to undergraduates that will foster excellence in undergraduate research. For this, we will work closely with faculty as they develop their curriculum in order to properly align their research assignment with the writing and source development requirements, similar to our work with the faculty member teaching NURS 116.

Conclusion

As academic libraries continue to express their value to their campuses, it is important to align library services to other student-centered services that promote student success and excellence in student research. Small campus libraries can benefit from their campus size because they can develop intimate working relationships with other student services units. Most libraries and learning centers have common goals of helping students become successful in their research and writing.

We asked ourselves the following question and encourage other small campus libraries to ponder the same one: How can we best work with other services and faculty on campus to fulfill that goal? This experience has worked for Penn State-Fayette's library and learning center, and we are now in the process of revising and improving our strategy. We hope that sharing these efforts will help other libraries and learning centers consider their potential for collaboration in student learning services.

Notes

1. Jean Sheridan, "Making Connections in the Classroom: A Model for a Library-Based Writing Course," in *Writing across the Curriculum and the Academic Library: A Guide for Librarians, Instructors, and Writing Program Coordinators,* ed. Jean Sheridan (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 95-102.

2. Janelle Zauha, "Peering into the Writing Center: Information Literacy as a Collaborative Conversation," *Communications in Information Literacy* 8, no.1 (2014), http://search.proquest.com/docview/1552719868?accountid=13158. ℀