

Undoing Our Instructional Past: Envisioning New Models for Information Literacy

Urszula Lechtenberg and Carrie Donovan

Considering all that we know about learning science, design principles, and reflective practice, is the one-shot instruction session an effective mode of knowledge transfer? If we could build information literacy initiatives from the ground up, based on students' prior experience and how they learn, our teaching would not be limited by past practice and our instructional roles could evolve in new ways. As a result, we would design and lead information literacy through a combination of opportunities such as teacher-training programs and instructional consultations intended to build scaffolded research assignments; librarian-faculty collaborations that prioritize the transferability of knowledge while honoring and disrupting disciplinary ways of thinking; and learning objects that provide an intentional structure for sustaining information literacy at our institutions.

Re-envisioning Ourselves

At the same time that we consider the potential for adjusting our teaching practices, we must rethink our instructional identities—expanding beyond direct librarian-student interactions toward the broader roles of facilitators of learning. Acknowledging the personal, organizational, and institutional issues that present barriers to adapting new identities is the first step to changing them. This will involve rethinking the roles we have as educators, the metrics we use to communicate the value of the library, and the perception of librarians as service providers. Although great risk is involved in this kind of change, the rewards that come with applying our expertise to large-scale questions around student learning will be transformative.

Focusing our instructional energies and intentions on student learning rather than librarians' teaching frees us from defining our instructional impact with basic metrics and allows us to work toward curriculum-integrated programs in which we are positioned as facilitators rather than the keepers of information literacy. A critical aspect of building new strategies is to acknowledge that large-scale curricular change involving information literacy will require risk-taking, iteration, and time. As Pagowsky reminds us, "curricula unfold over time, which are at odds with the singular and repetitive one-shot."¹ With the educational expertise and influence librarians have cultivated at our institutions, we are well-situated to do the work required to move information literacy education from temporary and transactional to integrated and intentional.

*Urszula Lechtenberg is Learning Design Coordinator and Carrie Donovan is Head of Research, Learning & Media, both in Hillman Library at the University of Pittsburgh; email: url1@pitt.edu, cdonovan@pitt.edu. © 2022 Urszula Lechtenberg and Carrie Donovan, Attribution-NonCommercial (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) CC BY-NC.

Undoing the beliefs, behaviors, and systems that underpin library organizational cultures as they relate to our teaching will take time as well. Beginning with internal communication regarding structures for reviewing librarians' teaching and methods of measuring impact, we will need to address why teaching an ever-increasing number of one-shots does not necessarily correlate with success. Instead, librarians and library leadership must understand that integrating information literacy into student learning in targeted and intentional ways may result in fewer one-shots ultimately, but those declining statistics are necessary to allow for the capacity to develop new opportunities and deeper relationships. Building consensus and awareness around the benefits of instructional initiatives that prioritize student learning is necessary for shifting a decades-long de-facto instructional practice that centered on librarians' teaching. To engage with this idea, we have to step back from current practices to allow for the bandwidth for re-envisioning, rather than approaching it as an additional task.²

As participants in learning organizations, librarians are accustomed to taking on new tasks to adapt to change. We are less familiar with the process of discontinuing practices that are no longer of service.³ In our current and former workplaces, the authors of this piece experienced success in transitioning information literacy from one-shots to a more integrated approach by:

- Providing instructor training and ready-made activities, learning modules, or lesson plans for course instructors of multisection courses such as Introduction to Composition
- Offering workshops in collaboration with campus teaching centers to support the design and implementation of research-based assignments and assessments
- Incentivizing course and curriculum reinvention around the research process through grant opportunities for faculty (course-level) or departments (curriculum-level)

Through this work we have come to understand that replacing one-shots with intentionally designed and sequenced information literacy interventions across the curriculum is not a zero-sum game, but a chaotic process of re-envisioning and undoing that happens over time. Despite the challenges inherent in this kind of professional change, it has allowed us to progress toward more meaningful learning, relationships, and teaching in our respective careers.

Sustainability or Bust

Professional development for faculty around teaching information literacy allows for a more holistic approach that reaches more students. It also addresses issues of sustainability inherent to the one-shot model in favor of approaches that are more humanizing for librarians and empowering for faculty and students. Librarian-led efforts around assignment design allow us to guide conversations, clarify expectations, and help teaching faculty more clearly articulate their own pedagogical approaches.⁴ To move toward sustainability means redefining our role as information literacy consultants rather than service providers.⁵ Through instructional consultations, librarians and faculty can identify the best interventions to match student learning outcomes, rather than situating the one-shot as a default solution because it is what we know. This will change who, how, and what librarians teach, but letting go of our sense of ownership over information literacy can create leadership opportunities and the ultimate risk/reward for ourselves as educators.

The authors of this piece are aware of our privilege that affords us the opportunities to practice leadership and risk-taking in supportive environments. As white women working in libraries at a public R1 institution, we are committed to examining the ways this privilege has enabled our work and continues to inform our choices and goals. We are hopeful that

the work we are doing to make instructional practices sustainable will be to the benefit of library colleagues outside of formal leadership circles who face issues of burnout or job creep. Building sustainable practices requires professional capital that not all instruction librarians have in their workplaces, often due to job expectations or potential backlash. Organizational positionality and power are required to effect change, which is challenging for our colleagues of color due to the cycles of oppression that are deeply rooted in libraries and the academy.⁶ It is through a process of questioning, learning, and envisioning that we can begin to undo the long-standing practices and ongoing cycles that have influenced library pedagogy and recenter our work around students and their learning.

Breaking down existing structures through sustainable practices that honor students' experiences and prior knowledge may be approached incrementally at first, as early interventions and small moments can have a great impact. One possibility involves librarians' developing more intentionality and criticality around teaching information literacy through digital learning objects, lesson plans, and activities that can be incorporated directly into a course by teaching faculty. When developed using sound instructional design principles, digital learning objects can be effective in educating students about the research process. Another opportunity involves engaging students as content creators of learning objects and amplifying their voices through peer-to-peer learning experiences shared across courses. Teaching faculty might not be accustomed to this type of sharing but librarians can model the practice, as exemplified by Project CORA and the ACRL Framework Sandbox,⁷ to advance the cross-disciplinary development of transferable information literacy concepts.

In Conclusion

The more that we develop a range of instructional talents, the more authentic it will feel to embrace new roles that integrate information literacy into students' lives and learning through courses, curricula, and communities. From this intentional practice, we will develop the imagination to make information literacy more sustainable, measurable, and integral to student learning across disciplines. Celebrating our capacity to create institutionwide partnerships must be accompanied by a concerted effort toward letting go of past practice and ownership of information literacy that has resulted in the "culture of more" with regard to library instruction. Only then will we escape the limitations of the one-shot session to embrace new roles, challenges, and possibilities as library instructional praxis continues to evolve.

Notes

1. Nicole Pagowsky, "The Contested One-Shot: Deconstructing Power Structures to Imagine New Futures," *College & Research Libraries* 82, no. 3 (2021): 300, <https://doi.org/10.5860/crl.82.3.300>.

2. In one notable example, Penn State University's Library Learning Services practiced this kind of holistic re-envisioning through a "Library Instruction ReBoot" in which instruction librarians scaled back their face-to-face teaching to allow time and space for co-creating student-centered learning programs in alignment with strategic initiatives; see Anne Behler, "Time for a Reboot! | Library Instruction Reboot," *Library Instruction Reboot* (blog, October 23, 2018), <https://sites.psu.edu/libraryinstructionreboot/2018/10/23/hello-world/> and Anne Behler and Rebecca Waltz, "Stepping Back from the Line: How We Stopped Teaching and Built a Stronger Program" (*LOEX*, Virtual, May 7, 2020).

3. Melissa Bowles-Terry and Carrie Donovan, "Serving Notice on the One-Shot: Changing Roles for Instruction Librarians," *International Information & Library Review* 48, no. 2 (April 2, 2016): 137–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10572317.2016.1176457>.

4. Rachel Wishkoski, Kacy Lundstrom, and Erin Davis, "Faculty Teaching and Librarian-Facilitated Assignment Design," *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 19, no. 1 (2019): 95–126, <https://doi.org/10.1353/pla.2019.0006>.

5. Melissa Bowles-Terry et al., "Collaborating with Teaching Faculty on Transparent Assignment Design," in *Creative Instructional Design: Practical Applications for Librarians*, eds. B.K. West, K.D. Hoffman, and M. Costello (Chicago, IL: American Library Association, 2017), 291–311.
6. Sofia Leung and Jorge López-McKnight, "Dreaming Revolutionary Futures: Critical Race's Centrality to Ending White Supremacy," *Communications in Information Literacy* 14, no. 1 (June 2020), <https://archives.pdx.edu/ds/psu/33131>.
7. "Assignments," Project CORA: Community of Online Research Assignments, <https://www.projectcora.org/assignments> [accessed 15 November 2021]; "Browse Resources | ACRL Framework for Information Literacy Sandbox," ACRL Framework for Information Literacy Sandbox, <https://sandbox.acrl.org/resources> [accessed 15 November 2021].