

Librarians as Instructors: Implications for LIS Education

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ABSTRACT

This panel session will engage audience members in a research-based discussion of LIS degree programs' role in preparing librarians for instruction positions. Libraries have a long history of instruction and surveys indicate "large majorities of Americans see libraries as part of the educational ecosystem" (Horrigan, 2015). Instructional programming can be effective in improving people's ability to evaluate information and identify mis/disinformation, and learning to navigate the technologies to access information (see e.g. Austin et al., 2015; McGrew et al., 2019). Such instruction may be even more important given that communities that are historically marginalized are also disproportionately impacted by the topics library instruction tends to address, such as mis/disinformation, access to and understanding of various technologies, data and algorithmic bias, and related issues of online privacy and security.

Stakeholders identify library instruction as important (Blakenstein, 2022; Frederick & Wolff-Eisenberg, 2020; Lund et al., 2021; Hulber, 2023), and library job postings show increased attention to skills related to instruction (Lund et al., 2021; Sproles & Detmering, 2012; Wang, Tang, & Knight, 2010), but librarians often feel unprepared to conduct instruction (Julien & Genuis, 2011; Walter, 2008; Wheeler & McKinney, 2015; Young et al., 2020). Indeed, research shows that such skills are not widely taught in LIS programs (Anderberg et al., 2018; Hensely, 2015; Saunders, 2015; Valenti & Lund, 2021; Wang et al., 2021a). Further, Jaeger and Taylor (2021) suggest some professional librarians lack information literacy knowledge, while Bowler et al. (2019) found that librarians lacked the data science/data literacy knowledge to design data literacy programs. A review of the literature on data literacy education suggests that for those who work in the informal, out-of-school environment of the public library, there continues to be little in terms of training (Acker et al, 2024; Bowler & Shaw, 2024).

What skills, knowledge and abilities do instructional librarians need to develop, implement, and maintain instruction programs? The Association of College and Research Libraries (2017) lists the various roles of instructional librarians as advocate, coordinator, instructional designer, lifelong learner, leader, teacher, and teaching partner. Research shows that some of these roles and responsibilities are not well-supported in current LIS curricula (Valenti & Lund, 2021; Wang et al, 2021b).

Drawing on panelists' research into library instruction programs, this session will examine the knowledge and skills instruction librarians will need to develop, deliver and manage instruction programs, and how those areas are or could be addressed in LIS programs.

Panel Structure:

Following a brief introduction (Laura Saunders, 5 minutes), each panelist will give a short presentation (10 minutes) focusing on specific research findings and their implications for LIS education:

Don Simmons will present findings from a survey of public librarians across the United States, exploring how many are leading instructional programs on information and other literacies, and other civic engagement initiatives. He will share insights into the extent of these programs, the specific literacies they emphasize, and the opportunities and challenges librarians experience when developing and delivering such instruction. Additionally, he will discuss librarians' experiences implementing literacy programs, highlight successful initiatives, and examine the challenges of fostering civic and civil discourse in a polarized socio-political environment. He will also incorporate relevant literature and data to emphasize the importance of LIS education in equipping public librarians with the skills required to launch and sustain these instructional programs.

Heidi Julien will discuss findings from 30 years of inquiry into information literacy instruction, informed by national surveys in three countries, including the United States, and interviews with librarians in the university, college, and public library sectors. In summary, the gaps in librarians' preparation for the teaching role, and the challenges they face in providing effective instruction, are consistent across these settings and across time. Heidi's comments will focus on the ways in which master's programs can more effectively prepare their graduates to teach, so that instructional efforts are theoretically-informed, well-supported, and successful in meeting their goals.

Laura Saunders will draw on results from parallel surveys sent to discipline faculty and academic librarians in the United States exploring the extent to which they address news literacy skills in their teaching, which was later replicated by scholars in over a dozen countries. The findings of these surveys confirm earlier studies on library competencies and suggest that academic librarians need a strong background in pedagogy and instructional design, as well related interpersonal and communication skills to engage both faculty and students. In addition, they need a strong grounding in information and news literacy theory and practice, including evidence-based approaches to evaluating information, such as lateral reading.

Leanne Bowler's research focuses on young peoples' critical interactions with information and data, their technology practices, STEM learning, and how family, teachers, and out-of-school organizations such as libraries and museums can support young people's competencies in a socio-technical world. Drawing from her teaching and research in the area of data literacy and youth services, she will explore the challenges and approaches associated with librarian training in data literacy.

Presentations will be followed by an open discussion in which the audience will be encouraged to share where and how in their own curriculum these topics are (or could be) addressed and their own best practices for teaching information and related literacies.

The panelists will have several questions prompts prepared to help facilitate the conversation:

- In what courses do you address skills related to library instruction and related literacies?
- What pedagogical approaches do you use to address these topics in your course(s)? What approaches have been most effective?
- What challenges have you encountered in addressing these topics, and how have you confronted those challenges?
- How do you anticipate current trends such as AI and mis/disinformation might impact these topics and/or your teaching of them?

In the final 10 minutes, the panelists will summarize the experiences shared and best practices recommended, as well as any key ideas for next steps in the field. The panel will be relevant to instructors of library instruction and public services courses in the master's LIS curriculum.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

Information literacy, Education, Pedagogy, Teaching faculty.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

Information literacy, Digital literacy, Public libraries, Academic libraries, Mis/disinformation.

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