

Ethan Pullman

Experiencing ACRL's Immersion Program

Learning outcomes for future participants

Each year since 1999, ACRL's Institute for Information Literacy Immersion Program has been selecting 90 participants to join a team of nationally recognized faculty librarians at its annual program, which offers a teacher and program track and is held at a different location each year. This year, Immersion took place in Boston at Simmons College. The experience was much more than I had expected, even after reading the information on ACRL's Web site and e-mails from professional lists and talking to colleagues who previously attended the "four-and-one-half days of active learning and intensive interaction among academic librarians."¹

The tips were plentiful. So to avoid repeating the mistake of squeezing them all in a 50 minute session (or in this case, this short article), I'll apply what I learned at Immersion: Choose two or three outcomes! So here are my "learning outcomes" for the future participants of Immersion.

Disclaimer: Before any of the past participants, or Deb Gilchrist—our cohort leader—start flooding my e-mail or phone line for not including an 'in order to' statement in each of the following, making them

true "outcomes," and in the interest of saving space, please insert the following clause at the end of each of the outcomes given: "in order to maximize your learning experience at ACRL's Immersion."

Outcome 1: Go a day or two early, or stay a day or two late (both, if your wallet allows it). Since this was my first experience with an "immersion" program, I was not prepared for the impact of a full-day of activities

on the mind. If this is your first time at an intensive workshop, at ACRL's Immersion or elsewhere, this lesson might just be your life line, so don't waste it.

Arriving a day or two before will give you a chance to check out those local restaurants

and stores that were recommended by the program coordinators. That way, you'll have an idea of how long you have between sessions to make a run for an off-site lunch, or how late you can grab that last dessert you suddenly crave.



Immersion students engaged in some active learning. Photo by Jason Griffey, www.jasongriffey.net, reference and instructional technology librarian, University of Texas-Chattanooga.

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Even if you arrive on the day of registration, be sure to participate in the planned activities. For us, a scheduled tour of Boston, and the neighboring Salem and its famous “House of the Seven Gables” and the “Witch cemetery,” was a great way to get to know our surroundings. The tour guide was quite informed, and the walking and bus combination was wonderful (many of us stopped to taste the wonderful pastries at Mike’s Pastry).

On the other hand, staying two days after will allow you to reflect and, more impor-



Faculty recapping the program in the style of the *Wizard of Oz*.

Photo by Jason Griffey, www.jasongriffey.net, reference and instructional technology librarian, University of Texas-Chattanooga.

tantly, decompress. Trust me, you won’t feel like answering the inevitable, and innocent, question from a curious colleague: “So how did Immersion go?” You simply won’t have absorbed that experience, much less found words to adequately and truthfully answer such a question. “It went well” can’t possibly describe it. The truth, most likely, is that you did well most of the time, and quite possibly had a mental shut down other times (thank goodness for re-boot activities, like a reception and bowling at Milky Way).

Outcome 2: Do your home work and be ready for some active learning. There’s so much to cover in a short period of time, so be prepared to minimize information overload to help you participate.

Yep, I said participate. You’ll learn about teaching, and you’ll be asked to teach.

You’ll learn about learning styles and you’ll be asked to think about your own (be prepared to be surprised with the results).

Immersion is about active learning. Activities are participant centered; they are driven by their input and interest. While there’s definitely a curriculum and a plan, the participants think about issues and work on solving the issues at hand as a team.

In short, expect to present. Expect to critique. Expect to change your perception. Expect, most of all, to have a great time doing it.

Outcome 3: Network! So it’s not all about work (while there’s plenty of it). It’s a great opportunity to network. First there’s the opening reception, where you’ll meet your cohort leaders and other participants. The games were great ice breakers.

Then breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Not only is it arranged so that all participants share their eating space, but they have to meet with their cohort leaders and group. Even when you want to eat outside, there’s

more than one willing participant who’d love to share your love for that special place you found on your tour.

There’s also the mid-program break. Ours was at a dinner banquet at an old fashion style bowling alley with the heavy pins and small wooden balls with no holes for your fingers. Of course there were also pool tables, if one preferred. Not to mention the beer mugs with flashing bottoms that were quite the conversation piece (they still are when I serve my guests).

Finally, there’s the closing reception. Who new that our faculty was so talented theatrically? Watching them recap our program in the style of the *Wizard of Oz* was quite entertaining.

In closing, saying goodbye was difficult, but knowing that I had gained future

friends and colleagues was all worth it. I'd like to leave you with a quote from a colleague's blog:

Well, I got home from ACRL's Institute for Information Literacy Immersion '06 in Boston a few days ago and I am dripping wet after being thoroughly immersed in information literacy for nearly a full week. It was an intense, but great experience. Not only did I learn a lot, but my perception of

information literacy has changed and I've gotten so many ideas I want to try out.—*Amy Ferguson, Instructional Services Librarian, Richland College, Texas*²

Notes

1. Where to find the information? ACRL's Institute for Information Literacy Immersion Program at www.acrl.org/immersion.

2. infolitlibrarian.blogspot.com/2006/08/immersion-06.html. *zz*

December 1 is the deadline to apply for Immersion '07

ACRL's Institute for Information Literacy invites you to apply for its 2007 Immersion Program. Whether your institution is just beginning to think about implementing an information literacy component or whether you have a program well underway, Immersion '07 will provide you with the intellectual tools and practical techniques to help your institution build or enhance its instruction program.

The institute is proud to offer its first international Immersion program at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, August 5–10, 2007. The University of Manitoba, the University of Winnipeg, and Brandon University are cohosting Immersion '07.

Winnipeg is located in the heart of Canada, and is the capital city of the province of Manitoba. It is described as the cultural cradle of Canada, and its central location makes it easily accessible with direct flights available from many major U.S. cities.

A faculty of nationally recognized librarians will offer the program. Program sessions fall into two separate tracks.

Teacher Track

This track focuses on individual development for those who are interested in enhancing, refreshing, or extending their individual instruction skills. Curriculum includes classroom techniques, learning theory, leadership, and assessment framed in the context of information literacy.

Participants selected for the Teacher Track will prepare a description of an instructional situation and a related presentation in advance of the Immersion program.

Program Track

This track focuses on developing, integrating, and managing institutional and programmatic information literacy programs. Participants selected for the Program Track will develop individual case studies in advance of the Immersion program.

Change dynamics, systems thinking, institutional outcomes assessment, scalability, and the integration of teaching, learning, and technology will be brought to bear on analyzing the various programmatic challenges presented in the case studies. Immersion participants will be expected to develop the case studies into an action plan for implementation at the home institution.

How to apply

Complete details about Immersion '07, as well as the online application form and instructions, are online at www.ala.org/acrl/events (click "Immersion 07").

Acceptance to the Immersion Program is competitive; participation is limited to 90 individuals.

The application deadline is Friday, December 1, 2006. A limited number of partial scholarships are available for Teacher Track applicants only. Details are available online.