

Who's afraid of partnerships for information literacy initiatives?

Working together to empower learners

by Lynn D. Lampert

As librarians strive to infuse information literacy programs into university curriculums, an issue that dominates the landscape is whether we will listen to our faculty and collaborate to include both our and their visions. Clearly, in order to succeed, we must keep in mind Cerise Oberman's admonition, "There are a variety of voices currently saying something extremely important: librarians don't own information literacy and information literacy is not always described in the terms that librarians would use."¹ The current collaborative challenge offers us the opportunity to transform interaction into new realities and new relationships, both in and beyond libraries, which will assist us in our work to promote information literacy initiatives across our college and university campuses.

As the information literacy coordinator and distance education librarian at California State University (CSU)-Northridge, I have many opportunities to support fellow faculty members working to incorporate information literacy goals into their curriculum. One particular interaction with a unique program outside of the traditional curriculum proves that the collaborative efforts of faculty and librarians can help every student, regardless of his or her location, cross the seemingly insurmountable

bridges of the information universe by creating communicative internal and external learning communities. This article focuses on how partnerships and programs that emerge out of collaborations with those working outside of libraries—and even universities—offer infinite potential for achieving the goal of empowering all learners, both off campus and on, with the necessary information literacy skills for life-long learning.

New partnerships across campus communities

Following a "teach-the-teacher" workshop that outlined our library's information literacy program for faculty, I was contacted by the Center for Management and Organization Development (CMOD)—a nonprofit consulting practice in the College of Business Administration and Economics at CSU-Northridge that brings real-world experiences into the academic setting while providing businesses and nonprofit agencies with access to the university's business faculty.

I was asked to design a class promoting information literacy in the CMOD's Los Angeles (LA) County Academy, a unique public-to-public partnership created in 1999 to meet Los Angeles County's workforce training and de-

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velopment needs by developing job-related certificate programs for their employees. The College of Extended Learning administers the program, and classes are team-taught by university faculty (full-time and adjunct) and staff from the county and other agencies. The principal partners in the project are the LA County Department of Human Resources and six California State Universities (Bakersfield, Dominguez Hills, Los Angeles, Long Beach, Northridge, and Pomona).

The LA County Academy offers a preparatory course for future county managers, courses for current and future personnel managers, and problem-solving classes (as well as certification training) for entry-level clerks. The program focuses on the key skills needed by managers to meet the increasing demands of a continuously changing environment. The certificate program was developed collaboratively by CMOD, the LA County Department of Human Resources, and the CSU consortium of all CSU departments of extended learning in the Los Angeles basin. Clearly there are many stakeholders impacted by new initiatives.

The faculty of the LA County Academy Program wanted to have a class developed that would introduce adult learners to a set of information literacy skills deemed imperative for their success in both the program and workplace. The curriculum for the course undergoes joint review and approval by non-librarians, teaching faculty members in several disciplines, and LA County program administrators.

Students in the academy program include individuals who work in all of the LA County's departments. The information literacy training component developed for this program offers an opportunity for these working adults to learn how to efficiently acquire knowledge in an online environment both in and out of the workplace.

After an overview of key information retrieval tools and services, students learn about the various services available, compare their ease of use and the quantity and quality of their results, and have a clearer knowledge of how to perform increasingly complex searches.

Links to searching resources and informative Web sites are presented to the participants for use at work after the program ends. Upon completion of this session, students are better able to find information using a combination of search sites and resources; know a variety

of sites on the Internet that can be used to find references to information on specific topics; are able to better evaluate which of these resources best meets their needs; and can compose simple and advanced search queries from a combination of keywords and symbols that can expand or narrow a search. Reviewed resources include recommendations made by librarians, the program faculty, and LA County.

This class has marked the first introduction to online research for many of these adult learners who serve so many in the community. In a sample survey of students, 92 percent stated that they had never had instruction about using the Internet or online research techniques, while 67 percent stated that they spent 15 to 19 hours a week online at work. The survey results also show that 75 percent of the students were more likely to use the Internet to find an answer to a work-related research question than consulting resources available through their institutional intranet, advice from a colleague, or consulting a librarian.

From reading recent research on information literacy and the workplace, I discovered the overlap of undergraduate student needs with those of the adult learner in this program. In addition, by learning about the importance of information literacy from publications of the business and government communities, I was able to transfer information literacy theories from the domain of the library to the issues of the program and the disciplines and stakeholders it supported. This investigation outside the confines of library literature strengthened my efforts to relate the importance of my proposed information literacy curriculum to the program faculty.

The collaborative challenge presented by the LA Academy project began with a phone call from a faculty member asking for instructional services for students outside the library's traditional target learning community. Today the project continues to grow and facilitate new relationships that strengthen the library's visibility and credibility as a genuine partner with faculty in educating students about the importance of information literacy skills. This new relationship has highlighted the need for librarians to allow the information literacy movement to take us beyond the traditional course by course journey where only individual librarians working with individual and classroom faculty or with a particular "traditional" pro-

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gram may successfully integrate the library into particular courses. Working with faculty members, departments, colleges, and extended learning programs and their curricula will help us to reach a broader spectrum of students. By transcending the boundaries of our traditional instructional environments we will be able to tackle the voices of concern about information literacy outside librarianship and perhaps beyond higher education.

A philosophical shift toward partnerships for information literacy

In their essay "The Future of Collaboration between Librarians and Teaching Faculty,"² Jean Caspers and Katy Lenn lament that the cost-cutting trend of increasing reliance on adjunct faculty greatly impacts collaborative efforts in higher education. "The norm will no longer be collaboration based on years of contacts and interactions. Librarians will need to make an extra effort in working with adjunct faculty who teach on an irregular basis and do not spend a great deal of time on campus."

Arguing for an increase in collaborative efforts between librarians and teaching faculty to bridge these barriers, they urge librarians to market instructional roles to the entire campus and greater learning communities. Their recommendation calls for librarians to build a range of "coalitions for information literacy that utilize political skills, including negotiation, persuasion, compromise and strategizing to achieve certain objectives."³

Ideally, librarians will adopt such skills, as they are all necessary for our success in collaborating with faculty to enhance library instructional outreach objectives. However, present reality shows that it is often commonplace to neglect the need for full partnerships and compromise when dealing with the topic of information literacy—an area where both real and imaginary boundaries still impede potential partnerships.

The growing number of online users drives the need for librarians to build and depend upon information literacy community partnership models in order to "help prepare the public to utilize information efficiently and effectively so they can fully participate in the workplace, education, community and family life."⁴

With a reported 72 percent of the U.S. population online, and indications that there is still a positive relationship between educational attainment and Internet use, the need for programs that intersect the boundaries of university and community continues to heighten.⁵ The work of the ALA Special Presidential Committee on Information Literacy Community Partnerships (2000–2001) should continue to serve as a framework for the growth of information literacy programs like the one developed for the LA County Academy. As stated in *A Librarian Advocate's Guide to Building Information Literate Communities*, "Everyone has a stake in building information literate communities. Corporate and nonprofit, government, education, social service and other sectors are all potential partners in ensuring that all people have the resources and skills they need to fully participate in an information society."⁶

Before I began working with the LA County program, I did not fully consider the positive impact of collaborating with adjunct and full-time faculty who teach our extension programs and courses. With our campus student population surpassing 32,000, the extension of instruction outreach efforts initially seemed beyond the productive scope of working to transition a traditional BI program to an active information literacy program. However, the work involved has shown that faculty-librarian collaboration in information literacy curriculum development and assessment is in fact the key to reaching learning communities within and outside of the expanding walls of today's higher education institutions.

Moreover, if the reality and perception of reluctant librarians' attitudes toward collaboration on information literacy instruction truly is as dire a situation as that painted by Risë L. Smith, much greater work along these lines lies ahead in forging new relationships. In expressing her concerns about the reluctance of librarians to relinquish or share information literacy instruction with faculty, Smith states, "Unfortunately, this attitude prevents information literacy from penetrating deeply into higher education and may partially account for the fact that the literature

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which illustrated challenges far different from those faced in the United States and Canada.

In a country of 100 million inhabitants, less than 1 percent are students in higher education. Less than 1 percent of Mexico's population has Internet access. Eight colleges provide library education at the bachelor's level; an MLS is not required to serve as a librarian. Of approximately 1,000 Mexican librarians, less than 100 hold an MLS and around ten have Ph.D.s. Only two schools in Mexico offer graduate programs in librarianship—one public (MLS and Ph.D.) and one private (MLS only). Most library degrees are conferred in the United States, while some are from the U.K. and Spain. There is no national bibliography and no union catalog. The Internet is the first choice for research sources. Recruitment to the profession is a key challenge.

Quijano observed that Mexico's long-shared border with the United States offers opportunities for collaboration, technology, and information exchange. Collaboration with the United States and Canada is now critical as Mexico seeks to develop standards for librarianship and to enhance the visibility and role of librarians and libraries in Mexico. "We need to share for our users," concluded Quijano. "We need to share with our partners, we need to share materials, but mostly, we need to share knowledge."

The challenges of Canadian libraries

John Teskey, director of libraries at the University of New Brunswick, described very dif-

ferent geographic, economic, legislative challenges. With 32 million citizens spread over 9 million square kilometers, Canada has been described as having "too much geography and too little history." Budget constraints and geographic distance have necessitated collaboration. With the exchange rate near \$1.52 Canadian to U.S. dollars, Canadian libraries' purchasing power has dropped sharply. Eighty percent of material purchased is either priced in U.S. dollars or originates in the United States. These limitations present challenges in collecting a full range of material.

Teskey described the legislative landscape and how Canadian academic and research libraries are joining to compete on a larger scale for limited federal funds. In Canada, education is a provincial responsibility, with funds coming from the federal government. One new federal program, the Canada Foundation for Innovation, funded \$20 million for a collaborative proposal signed by 64 university presidents across ten provinces with the goal of providing researchers across the country with unfettered access to the research literature. Negotiating as a national body has enhanced the four regional academic associations' ability to effect change.

Questions and comments from the audience focused on several themes, including diversity rates, language barriers, multicultural communities, cross-border security, hiring and exchange programs across borders, and resource sharing. ■

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of information literacy 'remains confined within the LIS discipline.' High-quality, course-integrated, curriculum-wide information literacy will not come from guarding the territory of library instruction . . . but rather from approaches that empower faculty, 'teach the teacher,' and cause librarians to 'break out of the library building and socialize with the faculty' wherever they teach."⁷

The act of "building coalitions for information literacy" should mark the first step in developing successful information literacy programs. However, a coalition is by definition a temporary alliance initially brought together for joint actions or goals. A coalition for information literacy is a partnership that needs to evolve beyond its founding objectives to meet expanding and sometimes permanent needs. The

success of the collaboration will depend on whether or not *all* the voices involved in the collaborative process are heard and respected.

Notes

1. Cerise Oberman, introduction to *Information Literacy Instruction Theory and Practice*, by Esther Grassian and Joan Kaplowitz (New York: Neal Schuman Publishers, 2002): xxix.

2. Jean Caspers and Katy Lenn, "The Future of Collaboration between Librarians and Teaching Faculty." *The Collaborative Imperative: Librarians and Faculty Working Together in the Information Universe* (Chicago: ALA, 2000): 149.

3. *Ibid.*, 151.

4. ALA. "Special Presidential Committee on Information Literacy Community Partnerships

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The Executive Committee's second meeting focused on receiving reports from the section's committee chairs. Sharon Bonk (Queens College), a member of the ULS 2004 Program Committee, reported that the program for the 2004 ALA Annual Conference will be centered on recruitment and retention issues and will include a component on professional education.

Pam Wonssek (Hunter College) reported for the Toronto 2003 Conference Program Planning Committee. The ULS conference program in Toronto will be a debate centered on the proposition that "by 2020, academic libraries will have outlived their need for physical space." Two 2-member teams of Canadian and U.S. academic librarians will debate this timely topic.

Lori Goetsch (University of Maryland) reported on the ongoing efforts of the Standards and Guidelines Committee in moving towards a unified set of academic library standards based on the College Library Guidelines. Hearings on the standards will be held in Toronto. The standards will also be reviewed by the appropriate ACRL sections. It appears that the branch libraries guidelines may be withdrawn, but that a distinct set of undergraduate library guidelines will continue.

Discussion groups

ULS discussion groups were active at Midwinter and well attended, addressing a number of timely and sometimes provocative issues.

The Current Topics Discussion Group continued its discussion of the library as "place." Three speakers addressed the unique aspects of their respective institutions as places. Two of the libraries discussed represent academic and public library enterprises. One of these libraries, Cornell College in Mount Vernon, Iowa, is a long-standing historical example of a joint college/city library. The other, San Jose State University, is new joint public and university library that is about six months from opening.

Lance Query, dean of libraries at Tulane University, described his institution's need to substantially expand the library and confront the issue of relocating a historic landmark building.

The Public Services Directors of Large Research Libraries Discussion Group covered an ambitious two-hour agenda ranging from discussions of faculty outreach to electronic reserves to virtual reference. Paul Constantine (University of Washington) led the discussion

on virtual reference. He reported that his institution and Cornell University have partnered in providing electronic "chat" reference so that extended hours of service could be offered. The conversation led to a discussion of permitting librarians to work at home while providing virtual reference services.

The last meeting of the Public Services Directors group at the ALA Annual Conference touched on UCLA's efforts to develop new measures for developing reference statistics. The group's meeting at the Midwinter Meeting ended with Janice Koyama (UCLA) leading a discussion on the new approaches that have been developed at the UCLA Libraries. The measures attempt to move away from a time-based approach to reference statistics to an approach that is more focused on the nature of the service being provided to the user. The categories that have been developed can be reviewed at http://stats.library.ucla.edu/reference/category_definitions.cfm.

The newly established Urban University Libraries Discussion Group met for the first time at the Midwinter Meeting. The group discussed issues such as homeless people in libraries, computing security, and the growing pressure to control access to university networks. —*John Lebner, University of Houston Libraries, jlebner@uh.edu* ■

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(2000–2001)." Retrieved March 1, 2003, from the Web at <http://www.ala.org/kranich/literacy.html>.

5. University Continuing Education Association. *Lifelong Learning Trends: A Profile of Continuing Higher Education* (Seventh Edition). (Washington D.C.: The University Continuing Education Association, 2002): 68.

6. ALA. "ALA Library Advocacy Now!: Action Plan 2001A Library Advocate's Guide to Building Information Literate Communities" (2001): 11. Retrieved March 1, 2003, from the Web at <http://www.ala.org/pio/advocacy/informationliteracy.pdf>.

7. Risø L. Smith, "Philosophical Shift: Teach the Faculty to Teach Information Literacy." ACRL 8th National Conference Contributed and Featured Papers. Retrieved March 1, 2003, from the Web at <http://www.ala.org/acrl/paperhtm/d38.html>. ■