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Curriculum mapping in academic libraries revisited

Taking an evidence-based approach

Curriculum mapping for the purposes of an academic library is the process of reviewing a degree-granting department's curriculum side-by-side with library learning objectives to situate information literacy instruction within the sequence of courses that a student will take.

In 2014, I undertook a curriculum mapping pilot for our library using a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis methodology as part of a leadership institute. My project looked at three degree programs at our university and suggested changes for further engagement with the departments. At the same time, three other librarians that I met at the leadership institute took part in curriculum mapping projects at their institutions using different methodologies. Together, we published our results in the *New Review of Academic Librarianship*.¹

Considerable interest in the topic of curriculum mapping in libraries is clear from the fact that this article has been cited 22 times and downloaded more than 1,800 times from Taylor and Francis and close to 5,000 times from an institutional repository. This article is meant to serve as a brief update to my initial project and to present a method for turning curriculum mapping into an all-in departmental objective.

In the months after our article was published, I received a promotion to head of the Research and Instructional Services (RIS) department, which is made up of

seven library faculty members, who teach discipline-specific library instruction, and four staff members, who teach core information literacy one-shot sessions.

I had to develop departmental objectives that first year, and curriculum mapping was one of the goals that I endeavored to expand to the entire group. We agreed to make ten curriculum maps. Using our weekly department meeting as a training session, I presented the curriculum maps that I had already made and showed the SWOT analysis method that I had used. Then I waited.

At first, not much happened, and I was worried because we had agreed to make ten maps in our goals. When we were getting closer to the summer, I decided to take action again. I completed a curriculum map for one of the Foreign Languages departments that I cover as a liaison. I realized that part of the difficulty of finishing a curriculum map is that it has to be done during librarians' downtime, and that that downtime might be split into multiple sessions. Realizing the difficulty that the other library faculty members in my department were facing, I made a cover sheet checklist

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that could be used to complete the curriculum map in multiple sittings.²

Additionally, I scheduled three hour-long work sessions, where we met in a classroom and completed our curriculum maps in the same place. This allowed everyone in the department to ask questions and feel a sense of camaraderie. We met the goal of creating ten curriculum maps for the 2015–16 school year. In 2017–18, we created 18 curriculum maps, and another department in the library completed two curriculum maps. For 2018–19, our departmental goals list that we plan on creating ten more curriculum maps and collaborating with our collection development librarians to see if any additional information can be added to existing maps.

Lastly, I made sure that each librarian's individual goals reflected curriculum maps, as well. With 102 bachelor's degree programs, 77 master's programs, and 4 professional degree programs offered at our institution, we plan to work on curriculum mapping for the foreseeable future.

The steps we now take to complete curriculum maps in the RIS department include gathering data, analyzing the data and mapping the curriculum, and conducting outreach. The data that we collect during the first stage includes our RIS data, which we collect on courses that participate in library instruction, research consultations, and LibGuides. We then review the course catalog for the university to see what required courses must be taken in the major. At this point, we also look for any courses that are designated as writing intensive or as a block-enrolled course for a living learning community, in order to offer targeted outreach to faculty. Using the university's data bank, librarians will pull data on how many majors and minors are in the department, among other details. The departmental webpage and student groups are also part of the review.

Last but not least, since we have been asked questions at departmental reviews during accreditation and have found this to

be a good way to start conversations about library instruction, I also ask librarians to see if they can find the review cycle for the program on the Institutional Planning, Assessment, and Research department's webpage.

During the second phase, the librarian maps the curriculum, looking for courses that are required at the 2000, 3000, and 4000 level. If a course is labeled in the catalog as writing intensive or as the capstone, it is given special consideration. They also complete a SWOT analysis to consider strengths and weaknesses that we already have in the relationship, as well as any opportunities or threats. Lastly, to close the loop, they have to conduct outreach to the program coordinator, director, or chair of the department.

Curriculum mapping successes

Although we have had some curriculum maps that have not resulted in increased connections with the department we have reviewed, we have had some great successes, some of which I will share here. I serve in the capacity of the liaison to the Foreign Languages. In the case of Russian Studies, we had never had a Russian class participate in library instruction. There are only two full-time professors in the department and a small amount of majors and minors, but I was determined to see if there was a place to include library instruction to reach the students.

I created a curriculum map for the department using the checklist and was in contact with the director of the Russian Studies program to ask for feedback. We scheduled a meeting in which I went to her office and listened. It turned out that due to a departmental mandate, this faculty member was looking for ways to assess her classes in addition to writing research papers and had experienced frustrations with the quality of the sources that students were using for the papers that were assigned. She also revealed that she had to be out of town for a short research project of her own.

I presented my curriculum map and offered to teach each of the classes she had during the week she would be out of town. The classes just happened to be at the 2000, 3000, and 4000 level. The 4000-level course was the capstone, which I especially wanted to be present in, since it was also classified as “Writing Intensive” in the course catalog and the students had to write a major research paper. In addition to helping her to cover the courses she would miss during her brief research leave, I offered to create an assessment based on my instruction for each level that she could use in her departmental report to satisfy the aforementioned mandate.

When we had an intern for the spring semester in 2018, I had him review the curriculum map for the Spanish department and offer feedback on the student perspective, since he had taken many of the courses where I offered library instruction for this field. I also had him contribute to the curriculum map by asking him to investigate and report on the research agendas and curricular interests of the faculty in the department.

The university has undergone a change to its writing program, and the prevalence of courses with a writing intensive designation has increased. Writing intensive courses often go hand-in-hand with information literacy instruction, since students often have to locate and cite sources in the course of their writing. The “Write where you are” university initiative has taken hold at East Carolina University in the last five years. Another success that the RIS department can report is that due to curriculum mapping, we offered information literacy instruction to 151 writing intensive courses during the 2018–19 school year.

Departmental results of the curriculum mapping project

In summer 2018, I asked the librarians who created the maps to report on their activities for each of the maps that they created from January 1, 2017, to June 30,

2018. This time period was meant to cover two spring semesters and summers, which is when most of the maps are created. The reporting document included questions about the time that it took to create a curriculum map, which data they accessed, whether the library had been providing library instruction in the past, whether they conducted outreach, and what form that took. I additionally asked librarians to report who they had contact with and asked for a subjective rating on how the contact went. Although more maps were created than were reported on, the results of this exercise will be interesting to anyone considering taking on a curriculum mapping project at their institution.

Fourteen curriculum maps were reported on by the RIS department from January 1, 2017, and June 30, 2018. Three librarians reported spending two or three hours on the maps, and on the higher end of the spectrum, five maps took longer than ten hours to complete and take action. Ten out of 14 maps referenced ACRL’s Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, which is something I had modeled when instructing faculty librarians to create curriculum maps. Half of the reported curriculum maps had listed learning objectives from past lesson plans.

For eight of the maps created, outreach was conducted to the home department. The other six maps had not undergone any outreach activities at the time of reporting, but the librarians expressed that they planned to complete the outreach soon. Two reported that they attended a faculty meeting, and three said that they met a new faculty member during New Faculty Orientation. Eight said that they sent an email or made a call to someone who was teaching a course, and six said that they contacted a curriculum coordinator in the process of creating the map. For most of the contacts, the librarians reported that they contacted a professor in the department, but three had contacted a department chair, and six reported contacting the curriculum coordinator for the unit.

Out of those who reported on the subjective feeling of the interaction, three said it went great, one said it was only good, and four felt it was fair, with no librarians reporting that they felt that the interaction was poor.

Having librarians report on the process of creating the curriculum maps was an informative exercise that helped me as a manager to see the time and effort that was dedicated to the process of creating the maps. Furthermore, as a manager, it allowed me to learn about some of the successes of the curriculum maps. Creating curriculum maps is a largely reflective endeavor that is meant to help the individual librarian find opportunities and have a greater understanding of the program that they are working with.

It was helpful for end-of-year reporting, as well as to bring other librarians on board. We had a few librarians who had not created a map, and this helped to show the benefits. In 2018–19, we also worked with the collection development librarians to add any information that they had to the maps.

Conclusion

By taking a deep dive into the curriculum of

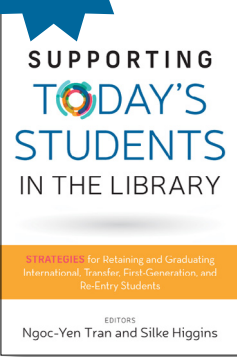
the departments that we liaise with, the RIS department has been able to offer more meaningful library connections when meeting with faculty instead of waiting for them to contact us. We are able to understand some of the issues they are facing and to ask questions that are based on the work that they are doing. By taking an evidence-based approach to our instructional outreach, we have been able to offer scaffolded information literacy instruction in many more degree programs. This has not only resulted in an increase in our library instruction numbers for these departments, but it also means better information literacy skills for the students and stronger relationships with departmental faculty in the university.

Notes

1. Heidi Buchanan, Katy Webb, Amy Harris Houk, and Catherine Tingelstad, “Curriculum Mapping in Academic Libraries” *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 21, no. 1, (2015): 94–111.

2. The curriculum mapping checklist is available at <http://thescholarship.ecu.edu/handle/10342/7568>. *ZZ*

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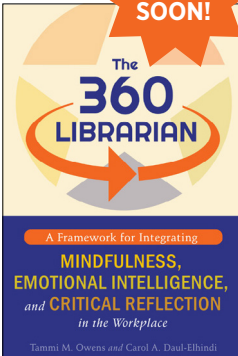


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