

Michelle Strasz

# Best practices for embedded librarian service

## Connecting with students online

**E**mbodied librarianship has been around for a long time. It was considered a buzz word and began appearing in journals and conferences early in the 21st century, according to Kathy Drewes and Nadine Hoffman.<sup>1</sup> Embedded librarianship became a way for librarians to provide research help and assistance to distance education students, as more library resources came online. Embedded librarianship has been an important service no more so than now in the new reality of the pandemic world.

COVID-19 pushed many universities to adapt and move their traditional and hybrid courses fully online. The pandemic also caused many academic libraries to close their physical doors, prompting librarians to work from home. Librarians were faced with opportunities and challenges as we connected with our students and faculty fully online; learned new video conferencing technologies as our face-to-face library instruction classes now needed to be held online; responded to a wave of new requests to be embedded into more courses; and updated current or creating new tutorials for our courses as well.

Librarians being embedded into courses within the university learning management system (LMS) is proving to be the best place for students to find research help when they need it. Embedded librarians provide students with research help, but also can teach information literacy library instruction either through video conferencing applications or customized tutorials. Embedded librarians can also assist faculty members with additional research needed for course content and by linking relevant library resources (articles, streaming

videos, subject databases, customized guides) into the LMS course.

I have been a research and online course support librarian at a small public university for the past five years. When I was first employed, I was tasked with expanding the Online Course Support Program and bringing the other liaison librarians onboard as well as ensuring this program was being used by more departments with the university. I began this effort by creating a set of best practices for the embedded program that liaison librarians would use for their embedded courses.<sup>2</sup> Here are the best practices we follow:

1. At the beginning of each semester, each librarian is to find the communication intensive courses or courses with a research component in their liaison area. Librarians are to contact the faculty members teaching these courses and ask to be added as an embedded librarian. It normally takes more than one email, but we find that once in a course, many of the faculty members add us by default the next semester.

2. Discuss with faculty members how active the librarian will be in this course, based upon the professor's preference. Inquire if any subject guides or tutorials are to be created and other library resources that are to be linked into the LMS course to help the students complete their assignments. If the faculty member agrees, add a

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librarian link in the navigation menu of the LMS course. If there is not a default library link created, the librarian must add this item to the navigation menu. When creating this menu item, it might be good idea to use the librarian's name. Example: "Librarian – Michelle Strasz," so the students see the librarian's name and know exactly who their course librarian is. The librarian menu item can link to a customized subject guide for that course.

3. Next best practice is to get the important due dates for these courses from the syllabus provided. It is recommended that each librarian add these due dates to their calendars, so they can send out a friendly reminder to students when those dates are approaching. Most often, we send emails to the students when the rough draft of their research papers is coming due to ensure they have the resources they need to meet the requirements of the assignment.

4. It is good practice for the librarian to send out an email to the students introducing themselves and explaining what the students can expect from an embedded librarian. We also send emails when we are working weekends. The liaison librarians are scheduled to work two Sunday evenings a semester. This has been a great way to connect to students because we have had many students reply to our emails who want research help.

As COVID-19 moved our traditional and hybrid college courses to fully online for the spring semester, we saw our number of requests for embedded librarianship climb and had more embedded classes this spring than any other spring semester to date. We ended the 2019-2020 fiscal year being

embedded into 188 classes, which is up from 101 classes in 2015. Also, the number of departments on campus that have used the embedded librarian program is up from two in 2015 to 14 in 2020.

Having these best practices in place has helped our group of liaison librarians be on the same page and has helped us manage this large influx of embedded courses. This fall semester, the university had a hybrid approach to classes because there were more classes offered online than ever before. Traditional on campus classes were still offered, but the amount of people allowed in the classrooms were greatly reduced. The requests for embedded librarianship soared this fall semester, and we were embedded into 139 courses. We taught library instruction through ZOOM, Microsoft Teams, and Canvas conference. There is still so much unknown about how COVID-19 will affect universities and libraries going forward but for now, many universities will continue offering more online classes. If your university library doesn't have an embedded librarian program, now would be a great time to start.

## Notes

1. Kathy Drewes and Nadine Hoffman, "Academic Embedded Librarianship: An Introduction," *Public Services Quarterly* 6 (2010): 75-82, accessed May 11, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15228959.2010.498773>.

2. Michelle Strasz, "Online Course Support Librarian Program Assessment 2018," Saginaw Valley State University Library, January 17, 2020, <https://librarysubjectguides.svsu.edu/oclassessment2018>. *zc*

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(*"The display's the thing," continued from page 83*)

dent's Book Club from the books in this display. The two others are on elections and voting<sup>4</sup> and Constitution Day.<sup>5</sup> While the virtual displays have not seen the kind of traffic and interaction that the in-house displays attracted, they have been an important way to connect critical current events to the library and to students. With no end to the campus closure in sight, I am thinking of how to use our technologies to make online library displays that do even more.

## Notes

1. I should note that the collection development librarian retired at the same time as the

display librarian. Our new collection development librarian has been working diligently to build our popular fiction and graphic novels collections, so some variation of these display ideas will be forthcoming.

2. <https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/handle/10161/20753>

3. <https://qcc.libguides.com/librarydisplays/blacklivesmatter>

4. <https://qcc.libguides.com/librarydisplays/voting>

5. <https://qcc.libguides.com/librarydisplays/constitutionday> *zc*