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Building a Scholarly Network in Learning Communities at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln

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Innovative Solutions for Building Community in Academic Libraries

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Chapter 2

Building a Scholarly Network in Learning Communities at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln

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ABSTRACT

In 2011 the Chancellor at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln (UNL) charged each department and academic unit within the university to create programs and strategies to increase student enrollment within the next six years. The UNL Libraries embraced this goal by becoming more involved in the first-year experience programs and the first-year learning communities. This chapter will outline how the UNL Libraries gained library administration support to hire a Learning Communities/First-Year Experience Librarian and describe how they applied the theory of threshold concepts to develop a series of workshops and e-booklets to teach information literacy skills to students affiliated with the William H. Thompson Scholars Learning Community. These two initiatives will demonstrate how UNL Libraries built connections with campus units and services to become actively involved in student enrollment and retention.

INTRODUCTION

The mandate of all universities and colleges is to recruit and retain students in college until they graduate. In 2011, the Chancellor of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) set the course for entry into the CIC Big 10 by challenging every college, department, and unit to become involved in developing programs and services to increase student enrollment by 5,000 students by the year 2017. The National Survey on Student Engagement (2014) states that the formation of First-Year Learning Communities and increasing student contact with faculty are two high-impact practices that positively improve student retention and enrollment. In response to this UNL employed administrative staff to establish and administer programs and initiatives for these students resulting in the formation of twenty-nine first-

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year learning communities and by 2014 UNL had established a First-Year Experience and Transitions Program. At this time the libraries had a few services specifically for first-year students that had evolved out of informal connections with other units, but the only consistent service to first-year students was the one-credit hour online library research course that was a requirement for some courses and programs. UNL Libraries recognized the need to be more purposeful and aggressive in responding to the Chancellor's charge and made a decision to partner with college departments and units that were dedicated to student success and student retention. These efforts were minimally effective as the library faculty only became actively involved in a few summer camps and academic support programs. The opportunities for the UNL Libraries to be more involved in the first-year experience of the students became apparent and in 2011, following the Chancellor's lead, the libraries hired a Learning Communities/First-Year Experience Librarian to work with teaching and research faculty and also the university's First-Year Experience and Transition programs.

This chapter will outline how UNL Libraries is becoming integrally involved in student retention and success by connecting with first-year learning communities. It will discuss how UNL libraries established a presence in the William H. Thompson Scholars Learning Community through the development of integrated workshops and e-booklets and by soliciting the support of the library administration. The following three programs will be highlighted: Interactive Research Workshops that incorporate a threshold framework and active learning; Quick Tip Booklets a supportive mobile teaching and research tool for the students and faculty and the Study Café, a dedicated space for study and academic support.

BACKGROUND

The Value of Learning Communities in Student Success

Learning communities bring together smaller groups of students who have the same academic interests and career goals. The types of scholarships the students may have, their shared academic disciplines, or a common theme that connects the students and their interests to each other make each learning community unique. The students take common courses, attend the community academic and social events, and sometimes live in the same residence hall. These learning communities make the student's academic career more relevant and support retention by (1) restructuring the curriculum to create connections between the courses (Pedersen, 2003), (2) merging the classroom and college social experiences to facilitate lifelong learning outside the classroom (Frazier & Eighmy, 2012), (3) providing more intimate contact with professors and teaching faculty (Rocconi, 2010), and (4) by giving students more opportunities to become involved in campus activities (Zho & Kuh, 2004). Frazier and Eighmy (2012) in studying the experiences of students affiliated with first-year learning communities found that "direct and intentional" faculty and staff involvement with the students resulted in a higher level of student satisfaction with their courses and their overall college experience (p. 25). Libraries can then have an impact on student satisfaction with their courses if their faculty increase their involvement with the students through instruction and other events.

For decades universities have documented the importance of the student's first year in college and have developed many first-year experience programs to provide for the academic and social needs of these students (Alexander & Gardener, 2009). The development of first-year seminar courses was in response to Tinto's research that first-year seminars positively impact academic achievement and also have

a positive effect on retention by supporting and encouraging the integration of students. (Tinto, 1987). Similarly, academic libraries have also been actively involved in first-year seminars and courses for decades. In 2002, Boff and Johnson studied the involvement of academic libraries in First Year Experience (FYE) course curricular, and found that although library involvement in curriculum development and teaching was evident in 86% of the FYE courses surveyed, library involvement constituted only a small percentage (1-5%) of the total course hours (Boff & Johnson, 2002). This questions the overall impact of the library's contribution to these FYE courses and the extent to which information literacy is truly integrated into the curriculum. It is apparent that to supplement classroom teaching, librarians need to find other avenues to teach and influence student learning and retention. Blackburn suggests that libraries can impact student retention by (1) building relationships with students outside of instruction sessions, (2) sponsoring student clubs and organizations, (3) being present at recruiting events, orientations and open house events, and (4) by volunteering or coordinating university-wide activities (Blackburn, 2010). First-year learning communities provide these opportunities for librarians if they are willing to increase their involvement and build new relationships with the learning community coordinators and staff.

If academic libraries are going to have a positive influence on student learning, their faculty and staff need to be more purposeful and assertive in the design and delivery of specialized instruction and services to first-year students. Such partnerships introduce the librarian as an equal faculty member (Armstrong, 2012) and help to alleviate some of the anxiety that many first-year students have towards the library and the library faculty (Kraemer, 2007). This philosophy provided the impetus for the approach taken at UNL libraries to connect with the learning community students through classroom sessions, informal drop-in consultations during evening study hall hours, and evening workshops for the students and their peer mentors.

Learning Communities at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln

At UNL, learning communities “are groups of students with a shared academic interest or experience who sometimes live together in the same residence hall, have shared classes, benefit from specialized support programs, and participate in unique academic, social and professional activities and events that enrich the community” (University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2014, p. 29). There are three main types of learning communities at UNL: scholarship based communities that consist of students who have qualified for the same scholarship or merit based program e.g. William H. Thompson Scholars Learning Community; discipline based communities that bring together students who are pursuing the same major e.g. Biological Science Learning Community; and career-based communities that are open to students who have similar career interests e.g. Brain Power: Women in Math and Science Learning Community. Any member of the university faculty or staff can submit a proposal to sponsor a new learning community ensuring that the communities are relevant and interesting to both students and faculty. This university-wide involvement provides an eclectic array of community offerings for the students ranging from specific majors (e.g. pre-vet, biology, art & design), to broad academic experiences and interests (e.g. business leaders, ROTC, responsible design). Over the last three years, the university has increased the number of first-year learning communities from ten communities to twenty-nine communities, but in 2013 only 15% of the incoming first-year class was affiliated with a learning community. The current goal of the admissions department is for 75% of the incoming first-year students to be associated with a learning community, indicating that the number of learning communities will increase drastically in the next few years.

Academic Libraries and First-Year Learning Communities

Librarians have been involved in student organizations and groups for decades, providing regular instruction through first year seminars (Braquet & Westfall, 2011; Taylor & Stamatoplos, 1999), personal consultations (Kraemer, 2007) and specialized classroom sessions (Kraemer, 2007; Shultz, 2013; Voelker, 2006), in addition to offering library tours and hosting social events for student athletes, sororities, fraternities and other university communities. The University of Central Florida designed and offered two one-hour workshops to students during their evening study hall hours (Rucella, 1993), while Washington State University librarians integrated their instruction into the athletic 'P.R.O.W.L.' program (O'English & McCord, 2006). Mississippi State University (Davidson & Peyton, 2008), and the University of Wisconsin-Madison (Jesudason, 2000) took a different approach, presenting library sessions for the academic advisors and the athletic academic tutors. UNL libraries also followed this model and work with the athletic tutors, offering library materials and services as needed, and presenting library orientation sessions four times a year for first-year student athletes.

In an examination of the literature surrounding library collaborations with student led groups Johnson, Clapp, Ewing and Buhler (2011) highlighted three innovative case studies of library involvement in student organizations, and encouraged more academic libraries to become integrally involved in the culture of the university by "moving from individually-based content consumption modes of instruction to a more collaborative, team-based, and creation-centered library instruction activities" (Johnson, M., Clapp, M., Ewing, S., & Buhler, A., 2011, p. 4). At the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, the associate dean established a relationship with the Student Services Division that resulted in the development of the library program entitled "Student Affairs Connection". The program involved assigning each librarian to a student organization, and the creation of the Student Library Advisory Council (Crowe, 2010). UNL although not assigning each liaison to a learning community, encouraged every liaison to make their own connections when they were ready. This broadening of the role of the liaisons to non-academic units on campus improved relationships between the library faculty, university staff and students, and also increased student involvement in the library planning and services.

It is evident that to create lasting relationships with learning communities it is necessary to gain support from the administrations of the library and the learning community. A recommended approach is to first solicit support from the dean and program directors, customize existing library services for the communities and then develop new sessions tailored specifically to the common courses offered within the communities (Kraemer, 2007; Rocconi, 2010; Voelker, 2006). Librarians at Buffalo State, after receiving the support of their library director and the Director of Interdisciplinary Studies, secured permission to offer Library 100, a one credit elective course, to students affiliated with the learning communities, (Frazier, 2006); and the University of Florida, in response to a request from the Undergraduate Studies program, created a vibrant instruction program for athletes (Ruscella, 1993). Gaining this support ensures greater integration of the library services and instruction into the learning community social events and curriculum, and also provides opportunities to make partnerships that benefit other entities within the university, ensuring the longevity of the collaborations (Kuchi, Mullen & Tama-Bartels, 2004). All successful library programs have administrative support inside and outside of the library and most the programs adapt a 'team approach' consisting of collaborations between the librarians and the community faculty and staff (Taylor & Stamatoplos, 1999, p.3).

UNL Library Involvement in First-Year Learning Communities

When learning communities were first established at UNL, the library faculty were not formally invited to be active contributors to the academic or social development of the communities. At that time, as an academic unit, UNL Libraries had a few events and courses for first-year students. The research and instruction department was responsible for the majority of these activities administering a one-credit hour online library research course that was required by the majority of the departments and colleges, in addition to offering a few additional outreach activities that were initiated by individual librarians. Some university administrators organized several summer bridge programs and camps that provided an opportunity for a few librarians to teach short information literacy sessions. One bridge program that was especially successful was the Summer Institute for Promising Scholars in which the librarians offered a hybrid instruction model allowing the students to take a one-credit hour online library research course with an additional weekly face-to-face class. Prior to 2012, the engineering librarian and staff were involved with the Engineering Learning Community, working with students on their course projects and joining them on their final community field trips. Partnerships like these provided models that encouraged other library faculty to find opportunities to initiate services and programs for the students affiliated with other learning communities.

UNL LIBRARIES AND THE WILLIAM H. THOMPSON SCHOLARS LEARNING COMMUNITY

The William H. Thompson Scholars Learning Community is a first and second year scholarship community that targets Nebraska students attending UNL who are the recipients of a Susan T. Buffet Foundation Scholarship. It is the largest learning community at UNL and in 2012 over 250 first-year students and 200 sophomores were enrolled in this community. The Learning Communities/First-Year Experience Librarian chose to work with this community primarily because of the distinctive needs of its diverse population. The demographics of this learning community are unique because it differs greatly from the largely homogeneous Nebraska population. According to the 2012 William H. Thompson Scholars Learning Community Faculty Manual, 35% of the first-year students self-identified as non-white and 73% were first generation college students with 50% coming from the rural regions of Nebraska. Of the second year students joining the learning community in fall 2012, 46% self-identified as non-white and 71% as first generation students (Griffin & King, 2012). This is significant because first generation students and students of color: (1) have been identified as having a more difficult time making the transition from high school to college than their counterparts, (2) are more likely to leave a four-year institution at the end of their first year, and (3) are less likely to be on track to a bachelors degree after three years of college, (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). To serve these students, the community has its own dedicated faculty that teach the common courses allowing for smaller class sizes and a more intimate relationship between the faculty and the students.

All students within the community are required to take English writing courses and this provided the first collaborative initiative with UNL library faculty. The librarians first worked with one member of the faculty to design three writing assignments that incorporated information literacy and library resources into

the English course. During the weekly classes the librarians modeled searching techniques, taught critical thinking skills and culminated each lesson with a discussion. The discussions solicited information that was used to improve the modules for future classes, and provided the preliminary evidence that proved that this learning community needed more library support than the librarians were currently offering.

Gaining Library Administration Support

Prior to the university's new Learning Communities initiative, the libraries had developed over the years various approaches to supporting the efforts of the university to prepare students for success in their academic pursuit. Librarians sought opportunities to collaborate with faculty and student affairs departments in their effort to find ways to reach students and to improve their information literacy skills. Some years ago, new hires in the libraries led to the arrival of several librarians who had a deep interest in the academic success of under-represented students at the university, and a series of initiatives began aimed at improving the experience of these students. These librarians developed relationships with the departments and programs that targeted these students and began to implement projects that sought to increase the information literacy skills and increase library usage among these students.

The librarians' goal was to initiate conversations with academic support departments about the benefit of including research skills into the academic support programming. Frequently the administrator and instructor were willing to incorporate a demonstration of the library catalog and e-resources in their sessions and these initial encounters opened the way for librarians to work closely with teaching faculty, many of whom desired enhanced instruction beyond the one-shot information literacy class. The librarians developed an assortment of programs including scavenger hunts for students, training for peer mentors and classes on research and citation skills to satisfy this need. Over a three-year period, library instruction was incorporated into the academic support programs, learning communities, undergraduate studies, and within the undergraduate creative research program. Based on the student evaluations, students were learning useful skills that hopefully resulted in better student papers.

In order to gain library support for outreach activities, the librarians demonstrated that their efforts were significant by providing evidence that instruction in the learning communities increased from zero classes in 2008 to a total of thirteen classes in 2011. The Library administration then drew upon these outreach activities to build the case to dedicate personnel to develop a strategic plan that was consistent with the broader goals of the university in the area of retention.

This prompted the libraries to become more proactive in their efforts and resulted in the development of a plan to increase involvement in the William H. Thompson Scholars Learning Community. The Libraries' executive committee articulated four goals to guide the Libraries' involvement as it prepared for the anticipated increase in student enrollment. The Library committed to doing the following:

1. Increase library instruction sessions to the existing learning communities, and also to the athletes, sororities and fraternities.
2. Increase the number of point-of-use instructional resources.
3. Evaluate library spaces to determine how to accommodate an additional 5,000 students.
4. Develop a proposal and plan for a first-year experience library faculty position to work with learning communities, and other first-year experience programs to assist first-year students with library research.

In 2011 The Learning Communities Librarian position was developed and later in 2013 this position was expanded to become the First-Year Experience/ Learning Communities Librarian. The position provided a coordinator and organizer of the first-year instructional activities and events across campus. The major responsibilities of the librarian were:

1. To provide leadership, support, and coordination of all aspects of UNL Library's first-year experience, education programs and outreach initiatives.
2. Develop and provide innovative library information services for the first-year students and students affiliated with learning and scholarship communities.
3. Coordinate, design, promote, assess and teach in the library instruction programs for first-year introductory and seminar courses.

The first challenges for this new librarian was to educate the library faculty about the new position, the UNL learning communities and inform the learning community administration about the library programs and services that could benefit the students affiliated with the learning communities. After meeting with the learning community administration, the learning community coordinator was invited to share information about the learning communities that were in operation at UNL, with the library faculty and staff. Following these discussions, the First-Year Experience/ Learning Communities Librarian provided the library faculty with specific information about each learning community that was within their liaison or subject area. The faculty was then encouraged to initiate contact with the learning community sponsors with the intention of partnering and providing library expertise and services to the students, faculty and staff in their respective communities.

THE INTERACTIVE RESEARCH WORKSHOPS

Learning Community Pedagogy

All students affiliated with this learning community were expected to participate in common events and workshops that were organized by their mentors and administrators. The community workshops were designed to facilitate teamwork and learning, enhance and support the student's classroom experiences and broaden the understanding of their discipline and course of study. Pedersen (2003) suggests that the large lecture environment is counter to the overall learning community philosophy of shared values and ideas because the format impedes the student's ability to investigate and dialogue with ideas or create new knowledge (Pedersen, 2003). This is due to the size of the lecture and not the lecture format, and this format is still used in some of the learning community courses, but the classes are significantly smaller in size, allowing for a more interactive learning experience.

When a multidisciplinary approach is taken to teaching, as it is in the learning communities, students become privy to a microcosm of the real world environment. They learn how to negotiate the intricate intersections of ideas and controversies in the world through classroom discussions and activities and this is when the students begin to understand that knowledge is a "process created within intellectual interaction, rather than an object that is transmitted" (Pederson, 2003, p. 9). It is within this paradigm that the library began to design services and workshops specifically tailored to the needs of the William H. Thompson Scholars Learning Community.

Identifying Student Research Needs

At the beginning of each fall semester the faculty coordinator of the learning community would host a day of orientation, community building and resource sharing for new and returning faculty including the First-Year Experience/Learning Community Librarian. During this orientation teaching strategies and pedagogy were discussed, and faculty shared concerns and issues surrounding teaching in the community providing an opportunity for information literacy discussions in a more collaborative way than in previous years when the librarian would present a fifteen-minute talk about library services and instruction. The faculty shared concerns with the student's inexperience with basic research skills and identified two major areas of need:

1. Students used the Internet and Wikipedia as reputable sources of information for their assignments and faculty thought this was due to the availability and easy access to the Internet. The faculty also shared that although students knew the information was not the best for their purpose they still decided to use it because it was downloadable and easy to understand.
2. Students did not understand why they needed to use a variety of sources and did not know how to incorporate these sources into their papers.

The Interactive Research Workshop Framework

The librarians decided to offer workshops specifically designed to meet the following criteria: (1) support the teaching faculty course instruction, (2) provide context-specific instruction, (3) use an active learning pedagogy and (4) foster information seeking habits that were transformative.

1. Support the Course Instruction

These workshops were not directly associated with a particular class, and so comprised of students pursuing a variety of majors, studying various topics and having different information needs, posing a familiar problem that every librarian encounters. Kraemer (2007) posed this dilemma as her 'biggest instructional challenge' when teaching in the honors learning community (Kraemer, 2007, p. 10). The solution that she found in Yee's (1984) admonition to focus on skill development and not website and database navigation, proved to be the most valuable approach to this type of workshop.

For the William H. Thompson Scholars Learning Community workshops, it was imperative that the workshop content provided the students with the skills they needed to complete the classroom assignments and course objectives. To ensure that the workshops were connected to the curriculum a combination of approaches were used to ascertain the students' needs and skill sets. Through discussions with the faculty at meetings and events, the faculty shared their perceptions of their students' research needs and this feedback informed the workshop content. However the degree of relevance and success was based on the students' intrinsic motivation because without a connection to a specific course assignment, the workshop would quickly become extra work for the students, and added stress for the professor and librarian. Although the course connection was an important facet of this instruction it was at times the most difficult aspect to establish because these workshops were offered outside of the class.

2. Provide Context-Specific Instruction

Providing context in a workshop was difficult but a necessary criterion to fulfill. While it is known that valuable instruction should take place when students have identified a need for the information (Klentzin, 2010), unfortunately not all of the workshops coincided with student assignments because these evening workshops were mandated for all the William H. Thompson Scholar students to attend whether or not they had specific assignments to work on. In order for the students to attach value to the session, the sessions were designed to provide the context for the information that would help the students to be engaged and see the relevance of the workshop to meet their future information needs. In the workshops, students were given short readings to stimulate interest and discussion. After reading the topics, they were given opportunities to discuss their findings and opinions on relevant discipline-specific topics, and given time to search the news sources for interesting topics and subjects for future research. The goal was to help them to understand the scholarly discourse within different disciplines, and to teach them the complexities of database selection and searching techniques.

3. Use an Active Learning Pedagogy

An active learning pedagogy was used as the primary teaching philosophy to keep the students engaged and motivated during the sessions. As can be seen in Figure 1, this is a method of teaching that encompasses a variety of teaching practices such as collaborative learning, cooperative learning and problem-based learning (Prince, 2004). Students retain new information quicker when they are allowed to use the new skill set immediately therefore activities were crafted to give students opportunities to practice and discuss the techniques and tools that were taught. An active learning pedagogy involves not only introducing activities into the classroom sessions but gives students the opportunity to apply what they have learned and also gives the instructor an opportunity to gauge the student's learning and adjust the lesson accordingly.

This approach provides an eclectic array of teaching methods and activities, and maintains an interesting energizing atmosphere in the classroom. Research shows that active learning increases student engagement and retention, gives the student opportunities to practice new research strategies and techniques (Freeman et al., 2014), improves student thinking and writing (Bonwell & Eison, 1991), and improves student attitudes to learning (Springer, Stanne, & Donovan, 1999). In addition to this, there is also evidence that active learning methods when introduced into student lectures and teaching in STEM disciplines disproportionately benefits students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Haak, et al, 2011).

4. Foster Information Seeking Habits That Are Transformative

For this learning community, each workshop was grounded within a 'big idea', an idea that had been identified as a possible 'threshold concept' for that content. Threshold concepts according to Hofer, Townsend, and Brunetti (2012), serve to give the students a conceptual understanding of the tools and skills that are taught in the sessions. Based on this information, an important part of the workshops was to design informal assessment activities that gave the students time to reflect, analyze and share their information seeking strategies and research behaviors. Each workshop allowed students time for reflection

Figure 1. Active learning

and sharing and gave them the opportunity to reinforce the skills and techniques that were taught. Time was also provided for clarification of any questions or problems that the students may have encountered. As the students identified their current information seeking habits and practices, they could more easily identify skills that they had not understood, and work on those skills during the workshops.

The Interactive Research Workshop Content

The UNL Libraries developed three workshops for the William H. Thompson Scholars Learning Community: Introduction to Research, Advanced Research and Using Google Scholar. The workshops were designed as a series and intended to build on each other in a systematic way. This approach was used successfully at the University of Minnesota in the design of their ‘Unravel the Library’ series of workshops for first-year English Composition students (Houlson, 2007). The workshops at UNL added accompanying e-booklets to extend the sessions beyond the classroom to give the students the opportunity to apply the tools and skills to all aspects of their academic career. The ‘Introduction to Research’ session laid the foundation, showing students how to develop a methodical approach to finding information using the library resources. The ‘Advanced Research’, introduced the students to more complex database searching techniques. The third workshop, ‘Using Google Scholar’, provided students with Internet searching options showing them how to evaluate Internet sources and use Google Scholar to locate reliable Internet resources.

Each workshop consisted of several sections:

1. Admit Slip - icebreaker, warm up question or short readings
2. Discussion
3. Techniques and Tools
4. Group collaborative or cooperative activity
5. Class problem based activity
6. Exit Slip-informal assessment

The combination and order of the sections varied according to the workshop, but every workshop began and ended with an Admit Slip and an Exit Slip, one serving as an ice-breaker/introduction to the workshop, the other as an informal assessment of the session.

Admit slips were in the form of a question that the students would respond to individually on paper and then in a small group, sharing their own opinions first and then incorporating the opinions of the whole group to share with the class. The questions provided the first connection to their course content or personal interests and were important to the success of the workshop. To ensure relevance and high interest, the questions selected were received from discussions with the teaching faculty or taken from past or present assignments. This important stage became the platform on which the students began to analyze their own information-seeking behavior. The discussion forced them to evaluate or refute the credibility of the contributions from the group and also gave the librarian a chance to gauge the knowledge base and skill level of the students and then adjust the focus of the workshops accordingly.

During the main section of the workshop, students began searching the library resources and the Internet for new and supporting information based on the discussion. Figure 2 shows how the workshops taught the content specific instruction using an active learning pedagogy within a threshold concept framework. The information literacy content correlated to the discipline subject matter, and the techniques and tool teaching sections contained the collaborative and cooperative activities. This gave the students opportunities to use the newly learned research skills to find more information, or confirm the information previously shared in their groups.

The exit slips provided the information needed to determine how beneficial the sessions were to the students. The questions used for the exit slips were centered on the process, the content of the workshop and the threshold concept. The feedback was used for follow-up workshops, to identify and modify the 'threshold concepts' in the sessions, and in the design of the Quick Tip booklets.

The Quick Tips Booklets

The Quick Tips Booklets are a series of teaching tools designed to reinforce the content covered in the workshops and provide more detailed information for further self-learning. The booklets focused on the underlying 'big idea' or threshold concept that the students may have missed in the workshops that would help them to understand and apply the concepts to other areas of their learning. Threshold concepts are foundational and disciplinary (Townsend & Brunett, 2011) and are concepts that may be difficult to grasp, but once grasped open a new understanding of the subject matter (Meyer & Land, 2003). They are both a product and a process. A product that is a cognitive idea of knowledge, a concept

Figure 2. The interactive research workshops

that “invokes ideas of deep learning, of being able to view the world in a different way” (Walker, 2012, p. 249), signifying the moment when a student understands something that he/she has previously found difficult and a process that is evidenced in the journey taken to understand the concept. This is shown by how the student views the world as a result of understanding the content.

The threshold concepts addressed in the workshops and the booklets were the six information literacy threshold concepts proposed by Hofer, Townsend and Brunetti, (2012), and from these six threshold concepts, four were identified to be pertinent to these students from a close examination of the assignments, classroom discussions, the exit slips from previous sessions, and discussions with the teaching faculty. Each booklet was designed to present the information literacy skills and strategies, within the framework of a threshold concept. Figure 3 shows how the booklets and workshops integrated to capture both aspects of the threshold concepts.

The challenge of the First-Year Experience/Learning Community Librarian was to change the way the students previously interacted with information and provide an environment that would facilitate a permanent change in their information seeking behavior. This required the librarian to change the focus of the instruction from simply demonstrating how to use specific library databases, to facilitating ‘an understanding of the tools and strategies’ (Blackmore, 2010) and so help the students to apply their new skill set to navigate any database irrespective of its design and interface. This, although difficult, was necessary if the booklets and the workshops were to have any permanent impact on the students’ attitudes to research.

For the William H. Thompson Scholars, six booklets were produced to be used in the workshops and also made available on the library website in epub, pdf and kindle format for students to download to

Figure 3. Quick tip booklets and threshold concepts

their mobile devices. Each booklet was formatted into six concise ‘tips’, and focused on the techniques and skills that were taught in the workshops. Any ‘tip’ in the book could be used at any relevant time during a workshop.

There were four ‘big ideas’ or threshold concepts that these Quick Tip Booklets addressed: Good Searches Use Database Structure, Format as a Process, Authority is Constructed and Contextual, and Information as a Commodity (Hofer et al, 2012)

Good Searches Use Database Structure

Introducing this concept in the first two Quick Tip Booklets “Narrowing Your Topics” and “ Searching a Database” gave students an opportunity to experience the discovery process that underlies a good information search. In these workshops, students articulated the scope of their research need, identified suitable sources and then developed a search strategy to find the information. Students then identified relevant databases using the library descriptions, and then examined database organizational structures before they began their searching. This helped the students to understand that information that is organized is easier to navigate, search and access using controlled language and Boolean syntax, and that the organization of a library catalog, a database, and an Internet site will either facilitate or hamper the search.

Format as a Process

This concept presented in the “Peer Reviewed, Scholarly and Popular” and the “Finding Reputable Resources on the Web” Quick Tip Booklets, investigated the purpose and difference between various types of publications. Here students had an opportunity to develop their own strategies for identifying the format, content and purpose of the sources. With the proliferation of Internet publishing it is important to help students understand that it is the publishing process and not how the information is distributed

and packaged that adds value and credibility (Hofer et al., 2012), so this becomes important as students transition from using simple checklists to evaluate Internet sources to analyzing the publishing process that created the documents.

Authority is Constructed and Contextual

This concept explains the relationship between the author and the purpose of the publication and was also highlighted in the “Peer Reviewed, Scholarly and Popular” and the “Finding Reputable Resources on the Web” Quick Tip Booklets. These booklets explained how to identify different types of authority, and how acceptable authority changes depending on the type of material and the context in which it is to be used. It introduced the idea that the type of authority is constructed and changes depending on the context of the publication (Hofer et al., 2012).

Information as a Commodity

This concept was central throughout all of the Quick Tip Booklets, but is covered in detail in “Finding Reputable Resources on the Web”. In this booklet students were taught how to evaluate information and how to cite and give credit to their sources. Students began to appreciate that information has value depending on who is its originator, who are its consumers or by the nature of its content. Through the active learning activity, this concept gave students the opportunity to talk about finding, comparing and evaluating different types of information found on the Web and to understand the meaning of intellectual property, open access and public domain. The Quick Tip Booklets were used in the workshops to reinforce the threshold concepts and to help the students apply the information literacy skills to their course content.

The Study Café

In its attempt to integrate information literacy into the efforts of the First year Experience initiatives on campus, the library sought to increase the number of collaborative efforts that could be undertaken outside of the normal class and workshop settings that would facilitate greater contact with the students. These efforts sought the added effect of showing goodwill and solidarity with the university’s First Year experience initiatives.

The connection with the First Year Experience/Learning Community Librarian led to the Library being invited to offer services in the “Star Center”, a satellite advising center located in the residence hall that housed the majority of the students in the learning communities. A team of four librarians, together with other campus departments took advantage of the opportunity and the library provided “Research Help” at the satellite support center twice a month. As the satellite tutoring service was attempting to establish a presence in the life of students, the challenge for the librarians was how to promote their services for the success of this new initiative. With this in mind, the librarians embarked on a promotion plan, creating publicity cards, flyers, and postcards to advertise the services to the students and the residence staff.

After two years, this satellite tutoring center was discontinued and the William H. Thompson Scholars Learning Community administration developed a learning study space, called the “Study Café” in a residential housing unit. The Study Café provided tutoring in a student space during the evening hours allowing students to connect with professors outside the classroom, and also receive help from their

mentors, and the First-Year Experience/Learning Community Librarian offered reference and consultation services in the Café twice a month. This provided yet another opportunity for the library to impact the student's academic life in the student space and it was deemed a promising way for the library to get involved with the work of the Learning Communities.

SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Libraries should try to create a team of librarians who will be responsible for instruction and organizing events for the learning communities. Learning communities do not easily match the subject areas of liaison librarians and this can be very challenging as it requires them to be more creative in the design of their sessions and activities, and also requires them to be less protective of their liaison areas and work in teams to support the multidisciplinary nature of the communities. Liaison librarians will need to commit to learning new approaches to instruction stay relevant to this type academic community.
2. Libraries should consider hosting social activities outside of the library building, and move events to the departments and halls of residence to reach students and faculty.
3. When setting up library 'outposts' or 'pop up' library stations librarians should try to partner with other services that are frequently used by students e.g. Combining Technology and Research help, or setting up with Writing Centers. This would provide a more integrated and relevant information service
4. It is important for universities to hire learning community and first year experience librarians that possess strong leadership skills and that have a solid foundation in information literacy theory and structure.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Three critical areas of further study and research have emerged from this project.

1. As universities increase the number of learning communities, it will become necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of library services to these communities as assess the impact as it pertains to issues of retention and educational experience.
2. Libraries need to develop a method for evaluating the current library services and programs that are available for the learning communities and assess their impact on the student, teaching faculty and library faculty. This will inform the development of improved services for the current learning communities, and direct the creation of services for new communities. Documenting and assessing library efforts with learning communities and other high-impact practices is necessary if the libraries are to provide services and instruction that is effective. Oakleaf (2010) laid out various measures of collecting data that can be adapted and applied to the learning community library services (Oakleaf, 2010).
3. The Interactive Research Workshops content should be aligned to the new ACRL Information Literacy Framework. Incorporating threshold concepts to all of the library's instruction will be a large undertaking. However a portion of this work has been done in the workshops and the book-

lets. The workshops and the booklets were designed using four threshold concepts proposed by Hofer et al (2013) but these were not conclusive. ACRL is still in the process of agreeing on the various sections of the Information Literacy Framework, and these when completed will facilitate the exploration of the “big idea” at a deeper levels that will help students understand the value of information, authority and context, and become critical users of information in their current academic and social endeavors.

CONCLUSION

For libraries to be successful in connecting with learning communities, they need to be proactive in establishing relationships with the learning community faculty and administration. With support from the library administration their involvement in the university will increase as the library invests in faculty and staff whose sole responsibility is to develop programs and instruction for learning communities. Librarians who become involved in learning communities need to be grounded in information literacy theory and pedagogy and need to be willing and able to teach various groups of students and communicate their goals clearly with the faculty and administration. For continued success, university faculty need to be willing to work with librarians and librarians need to be willing to work with faculty to design information literacy instruction that is discipline-specific and relevant to the course goals and objectives. The ultimate goal is to build scholarly networks that positively impact student success and retention.

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KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Academic Success Center: A support center that offers student programs and workshops that provide academic support, information and advising to help students succeed in school.

Active Learning: Any method of instruction that allows students to actively participate in the learning process through various activities such as: discussions, presentations, games or group readings and other shared activities.

Collaborative Learning: A facet of active learning that utilizes small groups, allowing students to work together on a particular task.

Cooperative Learning: A type of collaborative learning where students are put in small groups to work together to complete a task, and each member of the group is responsible for their own contribution and the overall group task.

Embedded Librarian: A librarian that is integral to the development of the class curriculum and is actively involved in the academic department.

First Generation College Student: A student that is the first person in their family to attend college.

First-Year Learning Community: A community of students who are enrolled in linked or shared courses and share the same academic interests. The communities sometimes live in the same residence halls, and provide events and opportunities that are designed to give the students unique social and academic experiences relating to their areas of studies or interests.

Learning Community Librarian: A librarian that is the library liaison to university or college learning communities in addition to scholarship communities and other student organizations and groups.

Problem Based Learning: A type of active learning where students are put in groups to find a solution to a specific problem.

Student Engagement: A student that mentally and emotionally connects with learning and expresses a deep interest in the process.

Student Retention: The ability to keep students enrolled in school until a degree or certificate is received.

Threshold Concept: A foundational disciplinary concept that is difficult to understand, but once understood, opens a new insight, without which it would be difficult to continue learning.

William H. Thompson Scholars Learning Community: A scholarship community at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln that consists of students who have received a scholarship from the Susan T. Buffett Foundation and who attend the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.