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Creating the IL Course in a University Setting

Catherine Cardwell
Ohio Wesleyan University, cardcat@owu.edu

Colleen T. Boff
Bowling Green State University - Main Campus, cboff@bgsu.edu

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Introduction

Too often, librarians develop information literacy courses without understanding how the courses fit into the larger campus community or in the overall student experience. For a course to be successful on an individual campus, librarians need to know the direction of the undergraduate curriculum, in particular the general education curriculum, as well as the steps they need to take to get the appropriate committee to approve the course. They also need to understand issues related to staffing, course delivery options, and budgeting. Librarians also need to have foresight and build courses for the future, not just ones that meet current needs. To do so, librarians should become familiar with national trends in teaching and learning at the undergraduate level, in particular how those national trends intersect with the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) and its initiatives. Because of their understanding of these trends and issues at the local and national level, librarians at Bowling Green State University (BGSU) successfully created a three-credit online information literacy course that receives general education credit.

Setting

About Bowling Green State University

BGSU is a residential university in northwest Ohio with approximately two hundred undergraduate majors and programs, approximately fifty masters degree programs and fifteen doctoral programs. The University System of Ohio considers BGSU one of its "four corners" institutions, which are "residential in character, liberal arts in tradition, and have recognized academic and research strengths." Ohio peer institutions include Ohio University, Miami University, and Kent State University.[1] BGSU has received national recognition for innovative undergraduate programs that include residential learning communities, first-year programs, and BGeX, a program focused on critical thinking about values. In 2007, the Carnegie Foundation recognized the university for its community engagement and in 2009, BGSU was selected to become a participant in the Association of American Colleges &University's (AAC&U) Bringing Theory to Practice (BTtoP) project. Recently, BGSU engaged in an extensive strategic planning process that resulted in even greater emphasis on improving the undergraduate experience at BGSU.

About the University Libraries

The Universities Libraries (UL) at BGSU is recognized as a college; librarians at BGSU have been faculty at BGSU for more than thirty years. As a consequence, the UL is able to have a curriculum and develop courses; librarians also have established seats, and therefore a voice, on curriculum committees, like Undergraduate Council and the General Education Committee, both of which approve and revise programs, courses, and policies. Librarians in the UL have been long been involved in delivering a variety of courses, some taught under a library course prefix and others taught for another department under its course prefix.

Objectives

In fall 2007, the Executive Vice President charged the University Libraries with developing an information literacy course that could be delivered online in order to help students complete their degrees in a timely way. The UL already had one course on the books-- LIB 222, a two-credit information literacy course that focused primarily on research skills, but the course was problematic for a variety of reasons, the greatest of which was that the course was only an elective and did not fulfill any graduation requirement beyond credit hours. Consequently, the course was frequently taken by students who had completed all of their graduation requirements but who just needed a couple of hours to meet the minimum number of hours required. Needless to say, the course was not rewarding for the students or the faculty teaching it. Although the UL had attempted to get the course included in the general education curriculum about ten years ago in order to attract a different student population, it lacked sufficient social science content to be included in the social science domain, and it did not emphasize an appropriate level of intellectual skills required for general education courses.

The librarians had a clear understanding that the LIB 222 course, as it was, would not advance the Executive Vice President's charge of creating a meaningful online course to help students complete their requirements in a timely way. Instead they created a brand new course LIB 225 (now LIB 2250) that incorporates more intellectual skill content. Luckily, in recent years, the general education domains had recently been revised from a configuration that had existed for more than twenty years (Arts & Humanities, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Cultural Diversity) to include a new domain called Expanded Perspectives, designed to include interdisciplinary, engagement, service learning, quantitative literacy or information literacy courses that meet the general education learning outcomes. Students pursuing a baccalaureate degree at BGSU must take at least nine courses drawn from the general education curriculum:

- General Studies Writing: GSW 1120

- Two from the natural sciences;

- Two from the social and behavioral sciences;

- Two from the humanities and the arts;

- One from cultural diversity in the United States;

- One additional course from any of the four knowledge domains listed above or from the expanded perspectives domain. (This is also known as the "ninth course.)

- One of the social sciences or the humanities and the arts courses must be an international perspectives course that facilitates student exploration of the significance of diverse international cultures on their own lives and promotes exploring the role of international issues and connections in an increasingly interconnected global society.

The addition of the Expanded Perspectives domain provided the UL with a pathway that allowed an information literacy course to be included in the curriculum in a way it had not been possible before.

Methods

In spring 2008, the General Education Committee approved LIB 2250 for inclusion in general education curriculum. The attempt to get the course into the general education curriculum was successful because of a variety of factors: librarians were well aware of national and local trends in undergraduate education, not just trends in academic libraries; they understood the curriculum processes on campus; they understood how their course fit into the overall student experience; and they understood how this course fit into their own workloads and unit goals.

National Trends in Undergraduate Education

Most academic librarians are keenly aware of ACRL and its Information Literacy

Competency Standards.[2] It is essential that equal attention be paid toward trends in

undergraduate education beyond the library world. Librarians need to be aware of developments

in organizations like the AAC&U, Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and

Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education (POD), along with

following advances in scholarship related to teaching and learning, in particular learner-centered

teaching strategies.

- **Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U)**

  http://www.aacu.org/

  AAC&U is the national organization devoted to advancing liberal education in the United

  States. As a result of its Liberal Education & America's Promise (LEAP) initiative,

  information literacy is included as one of its Essential Learning Outcomes

  (http://www.aacu.org/leap/vision.cfm). AAC&U has also developed an in-depth

  metarubric for assessing information literacy as part of its Valid Assessment of Learning

  in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) initiative.

  (http://www.aacu.org/value/metarubrics.cfm)

- **Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching**

  http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/

  Known for its commitment to the scholarship of teaching and learning, the Foundation

  develops resources for advancing education at all levels, but at the undergraduate level,

  the Foundation is committed to strengthening liberal education, in particular diversity and

community engagement. Many resources are freely available, though some publications are available for purchase.

- **Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education (POD)**

  http://www.podnetwork.org/

  The POD network provides a wealth of resources related to teaching, learning, and faculty development. The listserve hosted by the University of Notre Dame's John A. Kaneb Center for Teaching and Learning. is open to member and non-members. Links to Teaching & Learning Centers around the world are maintained on the "Resources & Useful Links" page.

- **The Teaching Professor**

  http://www.teachingprofessor.com/

  Maryellen Weimer began *The Teaching Professor* as a newsletter in 1987 but she now publishes a blog dedicated to practicing teachers who want to improve their teaching skills and improve their students' learning.

Refer to Appendix A for a list of additional suggested readings.

Local Trends and Curriculum Processes on Campus

If librarians are interested in delivering information literacy courses either at the university level or in a specific department, like the history department for example, they need to have vision, be politically astute, and know how to complete and route forms for curriculum approval. To accomplish these seemingly disparate goals, they must be actively engaged in the university or targeted department. Too often, course development fails because it was carried out in isolation without connections to key stakeholders or without an intellectual context for the

course or its possible future. It is essential that librarians establish strong regular connections at the university or department level. Politically it is difficult to advance an agenda if one is only at the table to advance his or her own agenda and nothing more. At the practical level, librarians also need to spend time reading the undergraduate catalog, understanding graduation policies, and knowing how to process course proposals, and at the same time they need to follow any upcoming changes in university initiatives and be aware of potential funding opportunities. For librarians who may be used to concentrating on library work, curricular planning and vision requires substantially different skills sets and support from library administration.

Librarian Workload, Unit Goals & Budget Issues

It may come as a surprise to librarians that tuition dollars raised by students registered in a course are not directly returned to the unit or college offering the course. That is the case at BGSU. When librarians in the UL teach LIB 2250, they are given two options: they can teach it as part of their regular job responsibilities, or they can teach it on an overload basis, outside of their regular job duties. The UL administration decided that it was important for the librarians to contribute to undergraduate degree completion efforts and is willing to accept the change in work duties or to pay the overload. Granted, only one class may be offered per semester, but the UL is raising revenue for the university and helping students graduate in a more timely way. The UL has found that it is difficult to offer the course during the academic year and prefers offering online sections during the summer when librarian responsibilities are different and students can sign up for the course when they are home for the summer.

Results: Course Content and Design

A small development team of three librarians with years of teaching experience worked on the course creation. Since the decision was made early on to offer LIB 2250 as a web based course, the librarians recognized that it was important for the three of them to gain additional insight into how to teach in the online environment. Fortunately, the development team was able to participate in an intensive two week training session offered on campus by the Center for Online and Blended Learning (COBL). The primary goal of the training session was to explore best practices for teaching online but the specific objectives were to experience first-hand effective strategies for course design, development and delivery; techniques to facilitate online communication and instruction in group projects and assessing online students; and ways to enhance a course with media and Web 2.0 tools.

This training session proved to be invaluable because participants gained experience with the front and back end of the course management system and experienced first-hand the online instruction environment from a teacher perspective as well as a student perspective. It also helped the development team formulate how to set up the course structure, something that was a stumbling block up until then. To teach exclusively online presents an extra layer of complexity when it comes to course design. In addition to content development, the technical side of navigating a course management system takes a great deal of time. If such training opportunities are not available at a local level, consider exploring the offerings through ACRL.[3]

In order to move beyond skills development and delve more into the intellectual competencies related to becoming information literate within a discipline, the course developers decided to make English 112 (now called GSW 1120) a pre-requisite. Information literacy competencies at the skill level are addressed in this required composition course that all students typically take their first year at BGSU. This is a logical place from which the development team

could build upon with LIB 2250. The course title for LIB 2250 is "Information Seeking and Management in Contemporary Society" and the course description is:

> The ability to locate, evaluate and use information effectively is essential. In this course, students will develop lifelong information management skills and deepen their understanding of current issues in the information world. This course will build upon the general information literacy skills that students acquire in English 112. Students will explore more discipline-specific online, print and non-print information resources to become efficient and knowledgeable consumers of information. Emphasis will be placed on critical thinking, resource analysis, and the ethical and appropriate use of information. Students will be able to transfer the skills and knowledge they acquire in this course to their future coursework, no matter what discipline they may be studying.

The course developers went directly to the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education for guidance on how to structure the content of the course. The course was initially offered during a six week summer session which enabled the development team to align the content of the course with the overarching ACRL standards. Four modules were created to reflect competencies in standards one (the nature of information), two (accessing information), three (evaluating information), and five (the ethical use of information). Much of standard four (uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose) was accomplished through various written assignments in the course.

The next big hurdle in terms of structuring the content of the course within an online environment was to consider how to structure each module and how to create a classroom dynamic among participants that was engaging. Based on what the course developers learned

during their crash course about teaching online, it was important to craft each module in such a way that students would come to expect a consistent delivery of content and overall structure. As a result, each module contains three folders: one for lecture materials, one with discussion board information, and a folder for assignments/projects. A quiz accompanied each module as well and it was made clear from the beginning that students could be quizzed over any part of the module, including the discussion board readings and responses. Each module lasted approximately one week and was released Friday evenings by 5:00pm. Students were expected to post initial responses to the discussion board prompts by the following Tuesday evenings at 11:00 p.m. Peer responses needed to take place by 5:00pm the following Friday evenings of each week before the discussion board would be turned off. This way, students would have the readings over a weekend.

It is worth noting that the course developers have been intentional about not adopting a textbook for this course. The lecture materials in each module begin with a word document that sets the stage for the module. This document always includes the student learning outcomes for that module and sets an intellectual framework for how the module will unfold. Directions for how the students are expected to proceed and interact with the material in the lecture folder are clearly stated. The remaining content in the lecture folder contain a wide range of learning objects including videos, tutorials, handouts, readings, etc. Some of these tools already exist at BGSU but in some instances students are linked to resources developed by librarians at other institutions. In the initial stages of development, it is critical to allow enough time to develop instructional materials in the event that a satisfactory resource does not already exist. Likewise, it is possible that additional learning objects will need to be prepared on the fly if in the midst of

teaching the course, it becomes evident that students need more clarification beyond what could be anticipated by the instructor.

A big concern for teaching any kind of course, whether online or face to face, is creating a class environment in which students are engaged in the course content but also with each other and the instructor. In LIB 2250, the way this is done is through the weekly discussion board activity. In fact, based on feedback from students and the various librarians who have taught the course, this has proven to be the favorite part of the course and has been very effective in creating a successful classroom dynamic in which everyone contributes and interacts with each other.

The key to the success of weekly discussions in LIB 2250 is that it is structured and it is made clear that everyone must contribute in a thoughtful way. It is also a weighted portion of their grade. Early on, students are also given a grading rubric for the discussion board and explicitly told that this will be used consistently throughout the course.[4] Students are given two to three articles to read for the discussion board and they are asked to respond to a question that prompts them to synthesize the discussion board reading along with the lecture materials. Their initial posting must be at least 150 words and include specific references to the articles and appropriate lecture materials. The word minimum is intended to encourage a quality response and in fact, students often exceed this as the course progresses. In turn, they are expected to provide thoughtful responses to at least two of their peers. One approach the librarians have taken to manage the quantity of responses is, in addition to occasionally chiming in on the conversation, they summarize and post key points from the discussion once it has concluded. This helps students to know that the instructor is involved without the instructor monopolizing the conversation or feeling pressured to respond to everyone.

The assignments in this course build upon each other. Students begin with two smaller worksheet assignments designed to help them investigate the various library resources and research databases in support of a particular, discipline specific topic/issue. Based on what they learn from these activities, they develop an annotated bibliography which they can use towards their final assignment in which they are required to write a seven to ten page paper utilizing their sources.

It is important to keep in mind that quizzes serve a variety of functions. They provide the teacher with a mechanism to gage whether students interact with the course content and if they understand the material. However, they are also an opportunity for the student to clarify why they get an answer wrong. For this reason, it is critical to utilize the functions within a course management system to provide students with feedback when they select a wrong answer. The correct answers should always be communicated in some fashion to the student. There are a few factors to keep in mind when constructing online quiz components. Some design issues to consider are the length of time a student should have to complete the quiz and the number of times a student can take the quiz. This can be an agonizing balancing act between trying to create opportunities for students to learn versus trying to create an environment that minimizes opportunities for academic dishonesty. Even after carefully considering these elements, flexibility will still be necessary to accommodate students with special circumstances.

Practically speaking, students who enroll in online learning opportunities tend to lead busy lives. Communication about when modules will be released and instructor expectations of meeting deadlines is critical. One assumption that students make in this type of learning environment is that they can procrastinate until the end. Expectations about discussion participation and meeting deadlines for quizzes and assignments need to be very clearly stated

from the beginning to dispel the notion of online learning as a blow off class. It is possible, as with any class, that when making these expectations clear, enrollment may decline.

Conclusion

When the national information literacy movement gained momentum ten to fifteen years ago, some librarians and libraries around the country urged colleges and universities to advocate for the adoption of an information literacy course requirement for all undergraduate students, much like composition courses. Some liberal arts colleges were able to accomplish this goal, but at large research institutions, even those with a dedication to undergraduate teaching, the addition of a new university requirement is almost impossible because of competing demands on the curriculum and students' time. Librarians at BGSU quickly understood that if they were to offer an information literacy course, it should one option among several possibilities, not a university requirement. At the same time, because of their experience with offering a purely elective library skills course, the librarians realized that any course they developed should help students meet some kind of meaningful requirement. Understanding the university curriculum and participating on university-level curriculum committees helped the librarians understand how their course could fit into the existing curriculum. They were also at the table when the general education committee was developing their new domain "Expanded Perspectives" and helped shape the parameters of that development.

At the moment, BGSU is about to begin a major redesign of general education, and as usual a librarian is on the university committee charged with the redesign. BGSU librarians in the near future will need to adapt LIB 2250 to fit into whatever new curriculum is developed, or they will need to be willing to eliminate that particular course and create a different one to meet

any new requirements. This type of flexibility, participation and understanding is essential if librarians want to be part of curriculum development and course delivery at a university.

Appendix A: Additional Suggested Readings

Association of American Colleges and Universities. *College Learning for the New Global Century: A Report from the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education & America's Promise*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2007. http://www.aacu.org/leap/documents/GlobalCentury_final.pdf. (accessed October 31, 2009).

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Notes

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2. Association of College and Research Libraries. *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education.* Chicago, Il.: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2000. http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency.cfm (accessed November 10, 2009).

3. Association of College and Research Libraries. *e-learning from ACRL.* http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/events/elearning/index.cfm. (accessed November 10, 2009).

4. Discussion board framework and grading rubric based on the "Discussion Questions Assignment" found at the Online Teaching Activity Index at http://www.ion.uillinois.edu/resources/otai/Examples/DiscussionQuestionExample.asp (accessed November 11, 2009).