



CHAPTER 8

The Embedded Instruction Liaison Librarian: *Creating a Workshop Series for Future Professionals*

Lindsay McNiff

Introduction

Information literacy instruction to support teaching and learning is a key component of liaison librarian work. However, liaison librarians provide much of their instructional support on an ad hoc basis at the request of individual professors in response to a particular assignment. Although many librarians prefer to design their instruction around specific assignments to provide context to students, many research assignments look similar and could be addressed through similar instructional strategies. When constrained by professors' expectations and limited time in the classroom, librarians may be missing the opportunity to help students in other ways and to demonstrate other elements of their expertise.

The School of Information Management (SIM) Academic Support Series is a set of extracurricular workshops designed to supplement students' academic study in

practical and valuable ways, provide a space outside the classroom for the students to collect research advice, and strengthen the liaison librarian presence in the Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) program at Dalhousie University. Since its creation in 2014, the series has gone on to become an integral part of the program and the student experience in the SIM. Although this series was originally devised for extracurricular purposes, many of the workshops have become required activities for core courses in the program. Through this series, the author has become increasingly embedded in the SIM, particularly in her instructional role. This chapter explores the genesis of this program and the steps that have made it successful, including identifying gaps, gaining faculty support, promoting the workshops, logistics, and evaluation. It also explores some instructional techniques that are used to ensure that attendance remains consistent despite the extracurricular nature of the workshop series.

Context

The MLIS program at Dalhousie University is a two-year ALA-accredited program housed in the School of Information Management. Students in the program have a variety of career goals ranging from traditional librarianship and archival work to data and knowledge management. The program welcomes approximately forty new graduate students per year. When the author became the SIM liaison librarian in 2013, the Dalhousie Libraries already had a history of collaboration with the SIM through welcoming students in practicum placements and internships and providing job-shadowing opportunities. Although these existing relationships were positive, the author immediately began looking for ways to strengthen the liaison relationship. At the time, the author's liaison relationship with the SIM was defined by the three main tasks traditionally associated with liaison librarianship: collections, reference assistance, and instruction (e.g., Zanin-Yost, 2018). However, students in the program did not ask many reference questions, and faculty did not issue many instruction requests. Although the author had an open invitation to attend monthly planning meetings and did so when possible, the relationship felt limited.

Background

Embedded Librarianship

The concept of embedded librarianship received a lot of attention in the late 2000s. Inspired by the idea of embedded journalists during wartime (Dewey, 2004) and having roots in the concept of an academic branch librarian (Drewes & Hoffman, 2015), embedded librarians work closely with their departments, facilitating something akin to the journalist's "insider's vantage point" (Helms & Whitesell, 2013, p.

401). The work of an embedded librarian may range from integrating into a course or program curriculum beyond a one-shot session, maintaining a presence in a course learning management system, holding office hours in a specific department and building closer relationships with faculty members, to more direct involvement with research projects in their departments (Kesselman & Watstein, 2009). Dewey's seminal 2004 article advocated for more direct involvement of librarians on the integration of information literacy skills into the curriculum and identified embedded librarianship as involving "a more comprehensive integration of one group with another to the extent that the group seeking to integrate is experiencing and observing, as nearly as possible, the daily life of the primary group" (p. 6). Dewey (2004) described the relationship of an embedded librarian with their group as "direct and purposeful" (p.6). Shumaker, another key figure on embedded librarianship who coined the term "embedded instruction" (Hoffman, Beatty, Feng, & Lee, 2016, p. 213), co-wrote with Talley (2009) a report for the Special Libraries Association that attempted to define the activities of embedded librarians. While their report acknowledged a wide scope of work associated with embedded librarians, they identified a key point: relationship building is integral to this type of librarian work.

At the core of an embedded academic librarian's work is the strength of the relationships they have built with their departments or faculties. What then is the difference between liaison librarianship and embedded librarianship? Both are interested in a particular group's needs and aim to develop their relationships to form a clearer picture of those needs. Schulte (2012) characterized embedded librarianship as part of a spectrum of engagement that librarians have been trying to facilitate for years. Zanin-Yost (2018) saw liaison librarianship and embedded librarianship as a matter of "different terms with the same goals" (p. 151) and suggested that the time may have come to revisit and update the term *liaison* to the term *embedded*. Two literature reviews (Abrizah, Inuwa & Afiqah-Izzati, 2016; Schulte, 2012) found that cases of embedded librarianship in the professional literature trend heavily toward integration in an online space, such as a learning management system, while evidence has shown that physical colocation increases patron-initiated transactions such as scheduled appointments, drop-ins, and instruction requests (O'Toole, Barham, & Monahan, 2016). While increased librarian presence in a physical or online space might be the core characteristic of embedded librarianship, a stronger presence is a goal for any liaison librarian. The difference, if there is one, may only be a matter of degree; or, "embedding," when paired with collection development, might simply describe a liaison librarian's work.

LIS and Other Professional Programs

Lowe and Stone (2010) articulated what they saw as a key difficulty in teaching information literacy to students in professional programs: because many professional

programs are master's or postgraduate programs in which students already have undergraduate degrees, students are even more likely to have an inflated sense of their information literacy skills. Despite this possibility, the need to work closely with students in professional programs on their information literacy skills is particularly strong, as professionals are often "intrinsically and deeply connected to their body of professional information, which is often complex and vast" (Lowe & Stone, 2010, p. 17). In developing information literacy opportunities for master's students in a TESOL program, Soules, Nielsen, Youn, Lee, and Al Rifae (2013) saw the need to address students' "long-term professional needs" (p. 36) in their information literacy programming and to provide students with information and skills that they would pass along to their own students in their future teaching careers.

In the case of LIS students, many of whom will become librarians or information professionals in a related field, the link between information literacy, their professional needs, and their impact on future generations of students and other information gatherers could not be more obvious. Beyond helping LIS students develop better information literacy skills, there is added value in connecting students with librarians and providing them with clear examples of the kinds of teaching that academic librarians might do. However, students in LIS programs may have some factors working against them in developing a relationship with their liaison librarian. In the author's experience as the liaison librarian to an MLIS program and as a former staff member at a library situated in an information faculty, LIS students seem to avail themselves of research help less often than their peers in other programs. Although this observation is anecdotal and warrants further study, it could be related to a few factors. Bronstein (2014) surveyed LIS students on their information seeking skills and found they reported a high level of self-efficacy, while Campello and Abreu (2005) found LIS undergraduates' skills inadequate for their future roles. One study comparing the information literacy skills of LIS to non-LIS students found that LIS students both overestimated their information literacy skills and displayed more uncertainty, anxiety, and embarrassment than non-LIS students when completing database searching tasks (Furi & Balog, 2016). Given that information searching is deeply connected to their field of study and personal interest, students may be hesitant to avail themselves of support from librarians for fear of appearing inadequate or unprepared for the profession in front of future colleagues.

Embedding in the School of Information Management

The author's goal was to provide MLIS students with more opportunities to interact with their liaison librarian and further their development as information literate professionals. Since one-shot invitations and reference questions were few, the author decided to find proactive ways to embed further into the SIM. Increased

reference interactions and instructional sessions were two ways that the librarian could increase interactions with students, assist them in developing their information literacy skills, and provide them with a visible model of librarian work. With these factors in mind, the author decided to approach the program coordinator about holding weekly office hours in the department and offering a series of extra-curricular workshops. While both proposals were accepted, the workshop series is the focus of this chapter. The author addresses the departmental office hours in the concluding reflection.

SIM Academic Support Series

The author's previous experience as a student at the University of Toronto's iSchool Inforum gave her the idea to introduce a workshop series. The Inforum, a library space located within the Faculty of Information, offers a robust series of workshops (now called iSkills) at the beginning of each semester for students. The series, coordinated by outreach and instructional services coordinator Kathleen Scheaffer, provides a range of technical and professional development workshops facilitated by experts from within the library, the university, and beyond (see <https://inforum.library.utoronto.ca/workshops/iSkills>). The author saw the Inforum series as a model of the type of extracurricular instruction that could support LIS students' studies and career development.

Identifying Gaps and Gaining Support

Faculty buy-in is critical to the success of most information literacy endeavors. As the new liaison librarian who, at that time, was essentially invisible to students, the author saw faculty buy-in as the essential first step. To generate interest from faculty members, the author had to prove that a workshop series from their liaison librarian would be a worthy addition to an already packed academic and professional development schedule. Students in the MLIS program already juggle a full course load, a Personal and Professional Development (PPD) series offered by Management Career Services, a public lecture series, and a lunchtime series of discussions with professionals in the community. The librarian had to demonstrate that adding yet another "series" to the docket would not result in a room full of empty seats.

Students in the MLIS program already had the opportunity to attend workshops about résumés, cover letters, interviewing, and making career connections, so while the author decided to avoid these specific career development areas, she still wanted to expand the definition of information literacy instruction beyond standard searching and evaluating of resources and connect it more broadly with their discipline and their future careers. The goal was to supplement student learning by identifying gaps in the professional and academic opportunities available to them.

To generate initial interest from faculty, the author first identified two such gaps. Through a discussion with a student who had just finished their first year, the author learned that students were creating conference posters for multiple courses without any clear sense of how to make a conference poster or how conference posters fit into the professional landscape. Students were also unaware of which external bursaries and awards were available to them and what the process would be to apply. With these two defined gaps in mind, the liaison librarian decided to approach the program coordinator, who suggested bringing the topic to a larger discussion with faculty members.

The author presented the idea briefly at a faculty meeting. The faculty members were receptive, and the identification of gaps sparked a longer discussion of other possible areas that students might be missing. The author also spoke to the faculty members about the possibility of either incorporating one or more of the workshops into a required course or offering participation points to students for attendance outside of class. This discussion gave the author an opportunity to reinforce the variety of topics librarians can teach and the different ways faculty members could include their liaison librarian in their courses. After the meeting, the program coordinator suggested that the author draw up and circulate a list of proposed sessions to faculty members.

Using the iSkills workshop offerings as inspiration, the author created what turned out to be an overly ambitious list of possibilities that covered everything from the initially proposed two workshops to online privacy, information literacy assessment, numerous specific databases, and more. After much helpful discussion between the author and the program coordinator regarding how many workshops would be realistic within a single academic year, they settled on the following eight initial workshop offerings, in addition to the existing APA workshop:

- External funding
- Library catalog orientation
- Graduate academic writing
- Conference posters
- Databases
- Bibliometrics/altmetrics
- Contract work in academic libraries
- Health sciences library careers

The librarian had previous experience teaching academic writing at the college level and felt she could offer a valuable perspective. She planned to approach writing from a researching perspective and from the viewpoint of an academic librarian and to offer some advice on the finer points of punctuation and sentence structure that the students were unlikely to encounter in other contexts. The librarian eventually conflated the two career-oriented workshops into a single session covering both topics and, at a professor's request, the librarian folded the Databases workshop

into the introductory Reference course. The faculty members were satisfied with the proposed workshops and planning officially began.

Logistics and Promotion

Creating a “Brand”

The author and the program coordinator agreed that the broad title of SIM Academic Support Series would capture the intent of the workshops. Now that the author had faculty buy-in, the next goal was to give the students a sense that the workshops were an official part of their program. Although this workshop series was new, the author wanted to give the impression that the series was an established part of their academic experience. This was accomplished by creating consistency across the workshops. For example, the workshops were all held in the same space, on the same weekday and time, and each was ninety minutes long.

Promotion

To promote the workshop series, the SIM administrative assistant created a page on the SIM website for the “Information Management (IM) Subject Librarian.” This page provided a photograph, some biographical information about the librarian, and the time, date, and location of each workshop. This IM Subject Librarian page was an important step for the author in establishing herself in the SIM, as the page, which was similar to those outlining each faculty member’s research interests, gave the impression that the librarian was an important part of the school. The author attended September orientation and prepared a ten-minute talk to deliver during one of the mandatory orientation sessions, and also distributed a print pamphlet with session titles, abstracts, and details. After the semester began, the author worked with the SIM administrative assistant to provide periodic email and social media reminders in advance of each workshop. Many professors in the SIM were also helpful in reminding students in the days leading up to the workshops. In 2018, the author created a two-minute promotional video using Biteable software to add to the website.

Two professors agreed to offer participation points for students to attend the Library catalogue and Bibliometrics workshops, which at least ensured an audience for two of the workshops in the first year.

Registration

The author required students to register for the workshops, which ensured that students would receive a reminder email the day before the session. When the series

began in 2014, the administrative assistant to the Killam Library Reference and Research Services managed registration through email; the author decided in subsequent years to move registration to a Google Form. Students continue to register through a Google Form, a link to which appears on the IM Subject Librarian webpage and the Information Management LibGuide. A friendly URL is also available on a print handout that the author continues to produce for orientation each year.

Instruction Techniques

The benefits of active learning techniques in library instruction are well documented in the literature (e.g., Cook & Klipfel, 2015; Cooperstein & Kocevar-Weidinger, 2004; Detlor, Booker, Serenko, & Julien, 2012). Cook and Klipfel (2015) usefully ground their discussion of student learning in cognitive psychology, stating that the two goals of good teaching should be to facilitate retention of information and the transfer of skills to other contexts. Active learning is the key to achieving both goals because by applying their new knowledge students are engaging with the “deep structure” (Cook & Klipfel, 2015, p. 38) or core principles of a concept. Students also respond positively to active learning environments; for example, Detlor et al. (2012) found significant differences in students’ perceptions determined by whether they had attended an active learning session or a passive learning session, and these differences spanned several variables including self-efficacy and students’ perceptions of librarians.

Students’ perceptions of their learning and of the instructor are even more important when the workshop is non-mandatory and extracurricular. When the workshop is part of a series, the instructor must try even harder to ensure that students see the value and keep coming back. To ensure continued attendance, the author devoted time in each workshop for the students to apply new information and held the sessions in a computer lab to ensure everyone had access to a computer. The author used the following techniques and others to create a fun and active learning environment:

- Google Docs to allow students to work collaboratively and anonymously while also leaving the instructor with an artifact to help determine how well the students absorbed the information
- Searching worksheets with assigned broad topics on an interesting component of information studies. These worksheets allowed them to experiment with Boolean operators (such as *online technology and death, library instruction and gaming, or librarians in popular culture*)
- A close reading group exercise using a short video as “text” (J. Sampirisi, personal communication, August 23, 2011)
- Online topic generators for search exercises
- Jigsaw exercises allowing students to learn a database and then teach it to a classmate. Jigsaw is a method of collaborative learning that has been identified as useful for information literacy instruction because it encourages students

to construct knowledge, take ownership of their learning, and share with their peers (Wang, 2007).

- Hands-on exercises with databases and other tools such as *Journal Citation Reports* to explore bibliometric indicators, PowerPoint to create conference posters, and Adobe's online color wheel to help construct a color scheme for a conference poster

The author created a page on the Information Management LibGuide to support the series. All the workshop slides and materials were posted on this page, along with in-class exercises. At the beginning of each session, the librarian would ask the students to open this page to find the exercises, documents, and links that would be used in that session.

The sessions on health sciences and academic library careers were largely discussion-based. The author spoke to the students about a key reality in academic library work that came as a surprise to many students: that many new academic librarians begin their careers on a temporary contract before moving into a permanent position. Each year that this session is offered, the author devotes half of the ninety-minute session to this discussion and invites a professional from another sector, such as a public library or a hospital library, to spend the other half discussing career paths in that sector.

Participation

In the SIM Academic Support Series' first year of existence, turnout was respectable. Those sessions for which professors allotted participation points saw higher attendance, but students continued to attend without that incentive. Participation has improved each year, and the general pattern has stayed the same: more students attend when participation points are at stake, but a core group of ten to fifteen students continues to attend most of the sessions. Although the author adds new sessions each year in the hope of attracting second-year students, first-year students in the program continue to be the primary audience. This may suggest that students see the series as a component of their experience in the first year of the program but do not necessarily see themselves as participants in their second year. It may also suggest that students have more momentum upon first entering a professional program, and this may be a key time to introduce these types of learning opportunities.

Evaluation

Feedback Forms

After each session, students were asked to take the last few minutes of the workshop to complete a half-page print form, which asked three basic questions:

- What did you find most interesting or valuable about this session?
- How could I improve this session? Is there anything you wish I had covered?
- Do you have any suggestions for future SIM Academic Support Series workshops?

Since 2016, the forms have also asked the students to rate the level of the content as *just right*, *too basic*, or *too advanced*. Although most respondents tend to select *just right*, the author feels compelled to monitor this to make sure the students do not see any of the sessions as egregiously below or above their perceived levels.

By far, the most prevalent theme that emerges each year from the post-workshop evaluation forms is an appreciation for the in-class exercises and the hands-on nature of the workshops. The prevailing critique over the past few years has been from students who wished some of the content was delivered more slowly, or with more repetition, particularly during the more technical sessions (such as Citation Management and Bibliometrics) and that some of the sessions were longer.

A few students offered suggestions for future workshops. Their recommendations were a mix of technical and conceptual topics, including getting the most out of course readings, imposter syndrome, PowerPoint, and advanced Microsoft Word techniques.

Survey

Using Opinion, the author surveys the students in March of each year after the series has finished. While the structure of the survey has changed over the years, the essence has remained the same. Students are asked to rate the relevance of each of the workshops they attended, provide demographic information (status as full- or part-time and expected year of graduation), and comment on a few other areas including key takeaways, the impact of the workshops on their professional and academic development, and suggestions for future workshops.

The author uses the survey responses to plan the following year's sessions and make necessary adjustments. While students cite different workshops as being most impactful or relevant to their needs, the conference posters workshop is a consistent highlight. Students routinely point to the active, hands-on components of the sessions as particularly beneficial. Students have also made comments that align well with the spirit and the intention of the workshop series. One respondent appreciated the opportunity to see the different ways a librarian can teach, while others enthused about how the workshops helped them to build their CVs. One respondent saw the series as evidence that the SIM cared about their professional development, and another claimed that the series showed them the value of professional development activities. Others appreciated the opportunity to learn about topics that they may not have otherwise encountered in class.

Adjustments

Using student feedback as a guide, the author has adjusted the workshop offerings over the years. The following workshops have been added to the series:

- Advanced searching and controlled vocabularies
- Citation management
- Easy Excel
- Effective presentations
- Grey literature
- Group work: Tools and strategies
- Intro to Information Literacy
- Intro to Opinio (survey software)

Except for Grey Literature and Citation Management, all of these additional workshops were the direct result of suggestions offered on the in-class feedback forms and the surveys. The author did not feel that Excel and group work strategies fell into her areas of expertise but still wanted to address the students' needs in these areas. She invited a librarian colleague to teach the Excel session and partnered with an educational developer from the Centre for Learning and Teaching to develop a session on group work.

Requests from professors to embed the workshops in their courses have increased, and two of the workshops are now embedded in the students' required research methods course, allowing the librarian a total of three hours with these students at different points in the semester.

Reflections

Students continue to respond positively to the workshops, and the author continues to monitor their satisfaction and make changes as necessary. Although the author is pleased that first-year students in the program continue to show up for the workshops, she would like to find a way to make her sessions more appealing and relevant to second-year students. As of 2017, the author now submits an annual report on the SIM Academic Support Series to the School Council, showing that the series has been fully embraced and is now considered an integral part of the students' academic and professional experience.

The author continues to offer departmental office hours as well, although these are not as well attended. Although the author offered weekly office hours at first, she has now transitioned to one ninety-minute slot per month according to a schedule available on the IM Subject Librarian webpage. While the author sees the value of being physically present in the department, the volume of questions does not warrant weekly office hours. The few questions that students do ask during office hours tend to be career-focused (such as résumé or interview advice) rather than

research support. Despite having an embedded librarian, the students underuse her for research support. This reality makes finding other ways to connect with the students even more important.

Carncross' 2013 review of the literature on embedded librarianship noted that better visibility in a course increases a librarian's credibility as a resource for students. One of the most significant and unexpected outcomes of this endeavor has been an offer to integrate even further into the SIM by teaching a credit course. Based on positive feedback about the Databases workshop, which was incorporated into the introductory reference course, the author was invited to apply to teach the course as a sessional when the current professor moved into an administrative role. The author has been teaching the course for the past four years and has enjoyed the opportunity to work with students more closely. In the dual role of liaison librarian and sessional instructor, the author has been able to balance topics offered in the Support Series with topics included in the course syllabus.

Conclusion

Embedded librarianship can take many forms, but the ultimate goal is a stronger relationship with one's patrons and a more nuanced understanding of their needs. By creating the SIM Academic Support Series, the liaison librarian has strengthened relationships with students and faculty members, gained the confidence and respect of faculty colleagues leading to an exciting teaching opportunity, and has gained that insider perspective (Helms & Whitesell, 2013) that allows her to respond more assuredly to students' needs.

The success of this program shows that a liaison relationship can transform quickly into an embedded relationship with the right approach. The author started by identifying specific gaps, which involved talking to students and offering solutions. By bringing these gaps to the faculty members' attention, the librarian demonstrated that she was invested in their students' specific needs. Positive feedback from the students allowed the program to continue and grow, allowing the librarian an even greater understanding of student needs and even increased the director's confidence enough to embrace the liaison librarian as an instructor in the program. At the heart of both liaison and embedded librarianship is the librarian's relationship with a specific group; increased embeddedness leading to stronger relationships is a goal for most librarians in liaison roles.

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