

Couldn't commit

As the end of the school year approached, I found myself having more and more conversations with students about what comes next. I am not sure if it is the economy or social pressures, but it seemed like the level of near-panic over life after graduation was higher than before. I know a lot of these students—some worked in the library, some were students in instruction sessions I had taught or who had sought me out for consults on papers or research projects, some served on committees—but the pressure to find the answer to the rest of their lives was the same. As they looked for jobs and considered life after college, a number of them asked me how I knew that I wanted to be a librarian.

Remembering back, I could definitely sympathize with the feel of impending reality and the anxious thought of “What-am-I-going-to-do,-it's-only-the-rest-of-my-life.” This stage actually occurred during my junior year (What can I say? I was an early bloomer). As a humanities and romance languages double major, it was pretty much a given that I would be going to graduate school. I started gathering information on graduate programs in all areas and making notes on any that sounded interesting for which I could qualify. It was all so exciting—folklore, classical archaeology, linguistics, renaissance studies, law, medical humanities (admittedly, I had no idea what that was at the time), textual studies, etc.

After several weeks, I had narrowed down the list to about 20 very different programs of study. I hadn't even really started to look at the schools because I couldn't decide on one subject over another, they all sounded so interesting. I remember being stressed at that point, not because I didn't have any idea what I wanted to do, but because I had too many, and I couldn't seem to pick one over another. I couldn't commit.

One day, as I was working at my student job on campus, I looked around and the answer

came to me (in retrospect, duh!). As I was sitting at the circulation desk in the Science Library at the University of Oregon, I looked around at the students and faculty and librarians, all doing something different or exploring different topics, and I had that Eureka moment—I didn't have to commit. It seemed obvious, as a librarian, I could continue to learn and explore many topics and subjects areas—any of those on my “short” list of graduate studies and more.

The same thing that drew me to the profession is what excites me about the July issue: it ranges broadly across librarianship—from empowering students to make sound financial decisions to examining perceptions of mental illness or information literacy and assessment as avenues for addressing equity and professional legitimacy. This month's issue is both highly pragmatic and strategic, while asking some hard questions and engaging in dialogues that are current in the profession and in society at large. In my opinion, it does exactly what a journal should do.

It was a pleasure to steward these articles, and I hope it is a delight to read. As diverse as the topics are, there is something for everyone, but I hope you will think, as I do, that each article is worth spending time examining because each contributes, in its own unique way to the practice, management, or culture of academic libraries.

“Library Support for Student Financial Literacy: A Survey of Librarians at Large Academic Institutions” by Lauren Reiter and Bronson Ford. Financial literacy came to the forefront as ACRL's 2013–2014 presidential focus, bringing increased attention to the topic among academic librarians and encouraging an exploration into new and developing roles for academic libraries in financial education. Via a survey of academic librarians at large universities of more than 10,000 students, the authors seek to determine what types of financial literacy support academic libraries are providing, who is participating, what prompted the initiatives, and what are the main barriers, challenges, and opportunities.

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“A Tool for Academic Libraries to Prioritize Leadership Competencies” by Gabrielle K. W. Wong. As part of a research project, Wong conducted a survey about Hong Kong academic librarians’ perception of leadership capabilities. The survey made use of the Leadership Competencies Model developed for the Library Leadership and Management Association. The results draw attention to a subset of competencies and expose perceptual differences between librarians at different leadership levels. By visualizing the data in a quadrant view, creating a leadership competency profile, the method can shed light on significant areas in leadership capabilities and trigger discussion among librarians on their understanding and assumptions about these attributes. The survey demonstrated a method that can be used by libraries and consortia beyond the Hong Kong sample. Such effort should eventually lead to constructive development strategies.

“Academic Librarians’ Experiences and Perceptions on Mental Illness Stigma and the Workplace” by Erin Burns and Kristin E. C. Green. Research has been conducted within academia about faculty members and students who have experienced mental illness from a variety of theoretical perspectives, including disability studies. While this research acknowledges that the stigma surrounding mental illness keeps people from sharing their experiences, there has not been research that focused specifically on librarians in higher education. This study sought to determine if mental illness stigma affects academic librarians and their professional environments, including teaching and providing services for students, using a survey modeled on one from the psychological literature. The responses revealed that stigma greatly influences academic librarians, particularly with regard to disclosure. An allowance for disclosure without the fear of stigmatization would not only help librarians but would also help other members of our academic communities. Sharing these survey results can begin to fill a gap that exists in the literature between librarians experiencing mental illness, the stigma that they experience because of it, and changing our academic culture.

“Reframing Information Literacy as Academic Cultural Capital: A Critical and Equity-Based Foundation for Practice, Assessment, and Scholarship” by Amanda L. Folk. Within the past decade, academic librarianship has increased its focus on critical librarianship and assessing student success, as well as undergoing a complete reconceptualization of information literacy. However, our assessment and scholarship related to information literacy and student success largely neglects the persistent racial and social-class achievement gaps in American higher education. This article draws upon a critical social theory commonly used in higher education research—cultural capital—to consider the ways in which information literacy as a threshold concept may enable or constrain success for students whose identities higher education has traditionally marginalized. Finally, Estela Mara Bensimon’s equity cognitive frame is introduced to consider the ways in which we can ground our practice, assessment, and scholarship in our professional values of equity and inclusion.

“Chat Reference Referral Strategies: Making a Connection, or Dropping the Ball?” by Paula R. Dempsey. The study analyzes how chat reference providers refer patrons to subject specialists in 467 interactions from a period of two years at a university library. Qualitative analysis showed variation in how referrals are presented: as an option versus a recommendation, putting follow-up in the hands of patrons versus librarians, and apologizing versus promoting benefits. Professional librarians referred more questions to specialists, framed more referrals as benefits, and sent more transcripts (“tickets”) than graduate assistants or paraprofessionals did. Findings show correlations between patrons’ positive responses to referrals and the extent of the reference interview and positive framing of the referral, but not the attempt to assist before referring.

“Do Download Reports Reliably Measure Journal Usage? Trusting the Fox to Count Your Hens?” by Alex Wood-Doughty, Ted Bergstrom, and Douglas G. Steigerwald. Download rates of academic journals have joined citation counts as commonly used indicators of the value of journal

subscriptions. While citations reflect worldwide influence, the value of a journal subscription to a single library is more reliably measured by the rate at which it is downloaded by local users. If reported download rates accurately measure local usage, there is a strong case for using them to compare the cost-effectiveness of journal subscriptions. We examine data for nearly 8,000 journals downloaded at the ten universities in the University of California system during a period of six years. We find that controlling for number of articles, publisher, and year of download, the ratio of downloads to citations differs substantially among academic disciplines. After adding academic disciplines to the control variables, there remain substantial “publisher effects,” with some publishers reporting significantly more downloads than would be predicted by the characteristics of their journals. These cross-publisher differences suggest that the currently available download statistics, which are supplied by publishers, are not sufficiently reliable to allow libraries to make subscription decisions based on price and

reported downloads, at least without making an adjustment for publisher effects in download reports.

“A Seat at the Table: Information Literacy Assessment and Professional Legitimacy” by Robert Detmering, Samantha McClellan, and Amber Willenborg. This qualitative study explores academic librarians’ perceptions of and experiences with information literacy assessment, focusing primarily on issues of professional identity, agency, and power. Findings from in-depth interviews reveal that instruction librarians view teaching as integral to their professional identity and use assessment to legitimize that identity, both personally and at the institutional level. While this suggests that assessment has the potential to elevate the status of librarians on campus, the interviews also highlight ongoing professional and organizational tensions that hinder assessment efforts and inhibit librarian agency. The authors recommend more transparent communication, among other strategies, to address these challenges. *✍*

(“Repackaging library workshops into disciplinary bootcamps,” continues from page 397)

it reaches a basic level required to run the program well. However, the time it takes to create and implement the program must be considered when contemplating whether to pilot this program.

Looking forward

While the content that these immersion programs are providing is not unique, the framework through which they are presented and their intense, three- or four-day delivery allows students a more comprehensive view of the research process and skills that should be developed to be effective along the path. By bringing broad disciplinary cohorts together to learn information management skills, the library helps to build student networks and gives librarians, students, and sometimes faculty an opportunity for close collaboration. Clearly, this is a realm—both academic and otherwise—that the library should cultivate. In addition, the

impact of these immersion programs on its participants is significant, both in the short- and long-term, as demonstrated by feedback from our past participants.

We hope that other libraries will be inspired to adopt a similar program to reach students who may need support in building their communities and learning critical research skills. Chances are that the expertise already exists within your library, and that it is just a matter of repackaging the workshops into a cohesive bootcamp program to deliver a full, impactful experience from which graduate students may benefit for a lifetime.

Note

1. Gabriela Castro Gessner, et al., “Humanists in the House of Learning: Academic Research Libraries’ Role in Fostering Communities of Practice,” in *Proceedings of the ACRL 2013 Conference* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2013), 281–88. *✍*