The university library's role in developing future librarian teachers

The University of Iowa Libraries' experience

by Marsha Forys

New graduates from schools of library and information science possess a basic knowledge of databases, classification, collection development, and reference. Historically, though, there has been a gap in the curriculum at many schools in the area of library instruction, which means that graduates are entering the job market unprepared for the instruction they may need to provide. One of the goals of the ACRL Institute for Information Literacy is to "prepare librarians to become effective teachers in information literacy programs."[1] The popularity of the Immersion program attests to librarians' desire to acquire the theory and practical skills that they did not receive in library school.

Beginning in February 2001, the University of Iowa (UI) Libraries and UI's School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) launched a collaborative program to give a small number of graduate students a student teaching-like experience in the area of instructional services while earning a salary as graduate assistants. Funding for the quarter-time position salaries is obtained by SLIS, and the UI Libraries provide the workplace. The graduate assistants work nine hours a week in the libraries' Instructional Services Department under the direction of the coordinator for instructional services. They begin this program by going through intensive training to learn public speaking skills, lesson preparation, and classroom equipment use.

The graduate students learn to prepare and present classes and they work on projects, such as handout and Web page development. They meet as a group for one hour each week with a SLIS faculty member to discuss theory and current issues in the area of library instruction.[2]

Since 2001, five graduate students in this program have worked in the UI Libraries.

Benefits for the students

The library science graduate assistants benefit from this program in numerous ways: 1) they receive experience in curriculum development, including how to write instructional objectives, create a lesson plan, and design the accompanying visual aids and handouts; for example, the graduate assistants were part of a group that developed the curriculum for the library component of a new class called College Transition; 2) they gain experience in classroom teaching, not only in the College Transition classes but also in a variety of course-related instruction sessions by first observing, then team-teaching with experienced librarians, and finally teaching on their own; 3) they have the opportunity to interact on a professional level with practicing librarians and they become an important part of the Instructional Services Department; some of them had the opportunity to make a presentation about this collaborative project at a state library conference and to present

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a poster session at the 2002 ALA Annual Conference; and 5) they receive experience in staff training because the coordinator has the graduate assistants who have been in the program longer help her with the training of the new graduate assistants.

Communication is an important characteristic of this program, and at every stage in the process feedback is provided. Throughout the semester the coordinator meets with the graduate assistants both individually and as a group to provide guidance and to see how their experience is going. The flexibility of this program allows her to modify their activities based on their individual needs and interests. The graduate assistants turn to the coordinator for advice, and she takes on a mentoring role in the areas of career development, résumé creation, and job applications.

In addition to providing them with a theoretical framework for information literacy and instructional services, the weekly seminar-style meetings that the graduate assistants have with the SLIS faculty member are important because those meetings give them the opportunity to step back and reflect on the work they are doing. It also provides them with another venue in which they can discuss career options, the field of librarianship, and related topics.

In reflecting on her experience, the program's first graduate assistant points out that "besides providing education about the role of librarians as teachers through Immersion, my experience in the program allows meaningful interaction with university students and practicing librarians on a professional level…I feel a greater sense of connection with the practice than the LIS classroom permits."[3]

This quarter-time assistantship has practical benefits, as well. Students can afford to take advantage of this opportunity because they receive a salary, health insurance, vacation time and sick leave, and are classified as state residents for tuition purposes during the semesters they are graduate assistants. The library instruction experience could have been structured as a practicum for course credit, but 80 hours would not have given the long-term exposure to library instruction theory and practice that SLIS students need, a feeling of being part of the Instructional Services Department, or the salary and benefits they receive as graduate assistants.

Benefits for the institution

The benefits for the graduate assistants are clear, but what may be less obvious are the many benefits the university library receives. First of all the program provides the library with additional instruction staff. This is especially helpful for handling the multi-section undergraduate classes, like College Transition, which have a library component in their curriculum. In fall 2002, the two graduate assistants taught eight of the twenty-four sections of that class and served as backup presenters for seven additional sessions. Also that semester they taught all seven sections of the library component of the Transition Seminar classes, which are taken by new student athletes. In fall 2003 College Transition grew to 50 sections, and the graduate assistants provided much needed staffing for those classes and for the eight sections of athletes' transition.

Having graduate assistants teach some of those sections frees the librarians to do reference, collection management, and other work. The graduate assistants enthusiastically seek to teach as many sections as possible because it is a new experience for them and an opportunity to gain skills and raise their comfort level in front of a class. They have not taught numerous sections of those classes in previous years and do not suffer from the burnout that can result from teaching this type of class over time.

The program also provides training and mentoring opportunities for library staff. The coordinator for instructional services does most of the training and mentoring, which she finds to be rewarding and fulfilling activities. In order to give the graduate assistants as broad a range of experience as possible, she also seeks opportunities for them to work under the guidance of other librarians. For example, one of the graduate assistants worked with the instruction librarian who coordinates the class sessions for the Upward Bound students who come to the library each summer. This graduate assistant's project was to revise the summer 2003 curriculum and to present some of those classes. The librarians have found that the graduate assistants bring new ideas and new perspectives to long-standing programs and projects.

Having the graduate assistants work in the Instructional Services Department has enabled the librarians to finish projects for which there previously had been no time. Each graduate assistant has one or more out-of-the-classroom projects to work on. One example of their projects is the creation of the "Evaluating Resources on the World Wide Web" handout.[4] Since its creation, librarians have given this handout to students in their classes

and numerous people take a copy from the handout rack.

The redesign of the Instructional Services Program Web site is another project that a graduate assistant completed. After looking at the instruction program pages from peer institutions and reporting her findings back to the coordinator, the graduate assistant developed a new site that focused on audience rather than type of service. Another graduate assistant redesigned the Instructional Services Program publicity brochure.

The host library benefits in two additional ways. The program helps build a stronger relationship between the library and the library school. In the long term, the library also stands to benefit from nurturing these students' interest in library instruction because applicant pools for public service positions will be stronger.

Lessons learned

The biggest frustration for the host library has been that the funding for this program is not permanent. Every year the SLIS faculty member has to seek money from the university for its continuance. This means that the library cannot count on having extra staff to help handle its multi-section classes, to work with Upward Bound, or to develop other projects. Additionally, the provision of training and mentoring takes a lot of library staff time, especially that of the coordinator.

Conclusion

The benefits of this collaborative program to develop future librarian teachers far outweigh the challenges. The graduate assistants have said it has been a rewarding experience. They leave school with a theoretical framework, as well as practical experience, in the area of library instruction, and they learn firsthand what it will be like to work as a professional in an academic library. This experience is something they can highlight on their résumés when applying for entry-level positions. The UI Libraries have benefited from their work, their ideas, and the training and mentoring opportunities this program gives to staff. The candidate pool for entry-level librarians has been enriched and the future employers of these graduate students will benefit from their skills as well as their understanding of both educational theory and the place of library instruction and information literacy in an academic library. The students who will be taught in the future by the librarians who were once graduate assistants will benefit from

lishes the Knowledge and Innovation Journal. The site provides links to member organizations, including consulting firms, education concerns, software and services companies, and others. The site provides links to white papers and articles, affiliate Web sites, discussion lists, world KM news, and the KMCI newsletter. *Access:* www.kmci.org.

• **KM.gov.** This site is supported by the Federal Chief Information Officer's Council and covers the activities of the U.S. Government's KM Working Group. It includes information on its various Special Interest Groups (SIG), including the Communities of Practice, Content Management, KM Education, and Public Policy SIGs. The site contains the documents produced by the Working Group, as well as a collection of linked-resources associated with KM. *Access:* http://www.km.gov.

• **KmPro.** This site is the home of the Knowledge and Innovation Management Professional Society. This is a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit organization. The organization serves its professional membership through training, consulting, mentoring, partnerships, networking, and publishing. The organization also supports a KM certification program. *Access:* http://www.kmpro.org.

Magazines, journals, and e-zines

• **Destination KM.** This is the home of *Knowledge Management* magazine, which existed in print from 1998 to 2001, after which it became an electronic resource. (An archive contains full-text of articles from the earlier printed volumes.) This site contains both news and feature articles relating to both KM research and industry players. There is a free monthly newsletter, a research center, event calendar, reading list, and reader polls. Also of interest is the partner publication *Portals Magazine. Access:* http://www.destinationkm.com.

• **Journal of Knowledge Management Practice (JKMP).** The homepage of this electronic journal states that it is the "rebirth of the *Journal of Systemic Knowledge Management* under a new publisher." Started in 1999 by Peter Smith,

editor-in-chief, JKMP brings together both theory, and case studies relating to KM to serve a multidisciplinary audience. The journal's editorial advisory board draws from the United States and European academicians and industry practitioners. *Access:* http://tlainc.com/jkmp.htm.

• **KMWorld.** This is the online counterpart to the *KMWorld* print publication. KMWorld is well known for its annual KMWorld and Intranets Conference, as well as its industry-focused magazine. The Web site extends the print publication with current news, an archive of past publications, special online resources associated with printed articles, and announcements of streaming audio Webcasts. *Access:* http://www.kmworld.com.

• **KnowMap: The Knowledge Management, Auditing and Mapping Magazine**. This bimonthly Web-based journal from Stanford Solutions Inc. is targeted at KM practitioners. While not a free journal, there are plenty of resources available to a first-time visitor. The journal contains contributions by many of KM's leading authors and consultants. *Access:* http://www.knowmap.com. ∎

the skills they gained in class preparation and presentation. This is a program in which everyone wins.

Notes

1. See the ACRL Institute for Information Literacy's welcome page, www.acrl.org/infolit (click on "Institute for Information Literacy"), accessed January 2004.

2. One of the graduate assistants created a Web site that describes the program, see mingo.info-science.uiowa.edu/~lawler/Teachers/teachers.html.

3. Jim Elmborg and Elizabeth Lawler, "Fading Shades of Green: Teaching Culture and the IS Experience," *LOEX News* 29 (Winter 2002): 14.

4. See the "Evaluating Resources on the World Wide Web" handout at www.lib.uiowa.edu/instruction/handouts/IB15.pdf.

5. See the Instructional Services Program Web site at www.lib.uiowa.edu/instruction/. ∎