

Bethany Wilkes

# Let's work out!

## Getting out of the library and into new collaborations and contexts

In order to develop strong campus connections and to expand the reach of library services, it's important for librarians to engage with faculty and students beyond the library and classroom environments. Some ways in which librarians may do this are through attending campus events, conducting outreach activities in areas such as student resident halls, and by simply visiting campus coffee shops and cafeterias.

These approaches to involvement with the campus community are good strategies for facilitating positive interactions with faculty, staff, and students, and can be avenues to promote the library and specific services. As a librarian who is primarily involved with information literacy, I'm continually looking for ways in which I can interject aspects of information literacy into these and other interactions, particularly in ways that connect with students' genuine interests and lives.

I recently worked as the information literacy librarian at the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) in Juneau, Alaska. During the spring semester of 2014, I enrolled in a physical education (PE) class at our campus Recreation Center (Rec Center), which was composed primarily of students. I was a regular participant in the university's PE classes between that semester and when I left the university in spring 2016. I also worked out independently (and admittedly, sporadically) at the Rec Center. At first I was a bit out of my comfort zone. While I was essentially

comfortable with the physical activities, it was definitely a different space to see students. Dripping with sweat and panting, I often replied to friendly greetings and chatted with them. At one point I was running around the track when my fantastic PE professor brought up one of her classes for intervals. She said something along the lines of, "There's Bethany! She's a librarian here and can really help you with your research. Make sure to see her in the library if you have questions." To which I smiled and waved (a bit awkwardly). What a surprising way for the library to be promoted to students.

### Background and preparation

From our interactions and from campus events where we were both presenters, I knew that my PE professor was a supporter of the library. She clearly cares about student learning and success. Given our professional relationship and her teaching style, I thought that she might be open to collaboration. I did some cursory research investigating what other librarians have done with PE or fitness classes, specifically in relation to information literacy. I found that articles addressing information literacy in this area are

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primarily about information literacy practices with Health Sciences students and university athletes. Justine Alsop and Robin Bergart examine teaching techniques of aerobics instructors and how they can be applied to information literacy, but they do not explore how information literacy could be integrated into aerobics classes.<sup>1</sup> They do ask, however, “Can we find ways to collaborate with them [fitness instructors] on library instruction...?”<sup>2</sup> Yes, we can.

While no coursework was required as part of the PE classes, we had discussions about current fitness research during classes, and there was a written final. As a class, we would often have short conversations related to fitness information and share recent findings about diet and exercise. As with other subjects, it is essential that students in PE classes are able to find credible information—a fundamental aspect of information literacy. With these considerations, and an eye for a potential opportunity to connect information literacy to students’ personal interests, I approached the professor of the class about leading a brief discussion focusing on evaluating information and library resources specifically for fitness during the next semester.

I proposed setting aside 15 minutes of the class that I was enrolled in for information literacy. During that time, I’d ask students to share some strategies for determining the veracity of the fitness resources they consulted, introduce the CRAAP test, and highlight a library database related to fitness.

I suggested 15 minutes, since students, of course, take PE to exercise, and I didn’t want to deter from the main purpose of the class (and I knew that my classmates would get impatient if they did not have ample time to work out). While short, I thought that 15 minutes would be fine for a starting point. The professor was very enthusiastic and agreed that it was essential that students develop the skills necessary to critically examine information sources, and that even a short discussion was a positive step toward that. In fact, she was so enthusiastic that she asked that I present in all of her PE classes.

## Presenting in athletic attire

I wanted to maximize the time that I was given during the PE classes, and I really wanted to motivate students to think carefully about the different sources that they use to obtain information related to fitness and how crucial it is that the information be credible. I established the modest learning outcomes for the class.

By the end of the class, students will be able to:

- list criteria to apply in order to determine whether a source is credible,
- use the criteria to evaluate a specific source related to fitness, and
- locate the fitness research guide.

In designing the session, and considering the short amount of time allotted for it, I aimed to give students a few strategies and tools that they could take with them to use to evaluate information and to find credible information. Before I started with my short discussion and presentation I planned to distribute copies of the CRAAP test with the URL to the course-specific fitness research guide that I created<sup>3</sup> at the top of the test along with a quick guide to the Natural Medicines database, to which the library had just started subscribing. My brief outline for the format of the class was to:

- ask students where they find fitness information, how they decide if it’s true, and have a related chat;
- review the CRAAP test with an emphasis on currency, authority, and purpose;
- highlight the Natural Medicines database and describe the fitness research guide; and
- allow time for questions.

When I first presented in the PE classes during summer 2014, I did not have a specific assessment for the session. However, with the continued support and interest of the professor, I was later able to include assessment measures.

I have been teaching information literacy for more than ten years, and the first time that I presented to one of the PE classes was

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unique. It was a class that I was participating in, and the time dedicated to information literacy was at the end of the class. So, in my sweaty workout attire and with a somewhat breathless delivery, I led my first information literacy discussion embedded into a PE class. The students were involved, asked insightful questions, and expressed appreciation.

### **Progression and assessments**

In summer 2014 I worked with two PE classes, and the number of classes increased as the semesters progressed. During the 2014–15 academic year, I worked with ten PE classes comprising a total of about 90 students, and the length of time spent on the information literacy component extended to 25 minutes, depending on questions. As of the fall 2015, our small university had an enrollment of 2,252 students, the majority of whom take classes via e-learning (distance), so reaching an additional 90 students through a new activity is not insignificant.<sup>4</sup>

As we continued our collaboration, the PE professor and I developed a question to help assess student learning, and she included this question in the final for the course: “Using the CRAAP Test, research and evaluate a current fitness-related article and identify each area of CRAAP in your response.”

While I did not receive statistics about the number of students who were able to accurately apply the CRAAP criteria and referenced credible sources, the professor noted that most of the students provided acceptable answers and shared some of the

responses with me. I was impressed with the thoughtfulness and thorough nature of the students’ answers.

I also received other formal and informal feedback. Students thanked me after the presentation, and a couple of them stated that they would share the CRAAP test with family members. Additionally, a student noted on the Student Course Rating at the end of the semester that the presentation was “wonderful.” Going into the session I was initially concerned that students may resent spending time on library-related material in an unforeseen context and not be receptive to the discussion and activity, but from the positive responses it seems that this was not the case (although I am aware that students can be quite polite).

### **Connecting with students**

The positive responses extended beyond the information literacy component of the PE classes. Increasingly, before or during PE classes, students would ask quick questions about the library or make a point of telling me that they’d see me soon in the library for help—which they often did. In the middle of an indoor cycling class a student started asking me about where to find scholarly articles for his upcoming Psychology research paper. I gasped out “PsyncINFO” and suggested that he come to the library the next day for a more serious conversation. He did.

As I continued to use the Rec Center, I interacted with an increasing number of students, many of whom I would later work with at the reference desk in the library or in other classes. I think that it is fair to assume that our communications at the Rec Center allowed them to feel more comfortable interacting with me as a librarian. Building these relationships with students was an unanticipated outcome of participating in the PE classes and using the Rec Center.

### **Development and future plans**

In spring 2016, before moving on from UAS, I changed up the class discussion and activity a bit in order to further engage

students and to give them the opportunity to critically examine a source during class before the actual final. I distributed three articles from different sources, and students determined the reliability and usefulness of the sources by applying elements of the CRAAP test. They also needed to determine in what context they might use the source (e.g., a research paper, to make a decision, etc.). In one class students broke into groups to work on the activity, while in the other two classes students completed the activity as homework. In all of the classes students took turns explaining how they applied the criteria and their appraisal of the source they were assigned. The class time dedicated to the topic was extended to about 30 minutes. While I touched upon concepts related to the frame during the class discussion, I think that emphasizing the frame of “Authority is Constructed and Contextual” from the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education<sup>5</sup> and how it specifically applies to fitness information could enrich the class. Additionally, a more comprehensive review of all of the responses to the related question on the final could contribute to a better understanding of student learning.

## Conclusion

Granted, there were times while I was exercising or navigating the Rec Center when I would have preferred to be more anonymous and more removed from the work day. However, the connections that I established far outweighed the minor challenges of such an atmosphere. I’m fortunate that the PE professor was so enthusiastic about our collaboration and that she recognizes the impact of information literacy on students’ lives and lifelong learning.

The PE professor and I were able to include a small information literacy component in her classes that students could directly apply to their personal fitness interests in addition to their studies, and it seems that my casual interactions with students contributed to their use of reference and other library services. My PE and

Rec Center attendance also led to familiarity with students in the varied course-integrated instruction sessions that I taught.

Overall I’m encouraged by this collaboration and hope to build upon the experience as I move into a new position and university environment. I will certainly look for opportunities to foster information literacy outside of the library and classroom environment and will continue to be open to exploring new opportunities that may present themselves in unpredictable circumstances and areas.

Teaching a small information literacy component in a PE class is one example of a way in which information literacy can be integrated into a class and taught in an unexpected context. While it can be challenging to step outside of one’s comfort zone, identifying and capitalizing on unusual opportunities to promote information literacy and establish contact with students can contribute to students’ information literacy skills and positively impact their experience with the library. By embracing new opportunities for library outreach in previously unexplored circumstances, librarians can extend the ways in which we promote information literacy and encourage use of the library. Let’s be on the lookout for such opportunities, wherever they may present themselves.

## Notes

1. Justine Alsop and Robin Bergart, “Aerobics and Library Instruction—An Unexpected Fit,” *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 14, no. 3 (2007): 121–26.
2. *Ibid.*, 122.
3. See <http://uas.alaska.libguides.com/fit>.
4. University of Alaska Southeast, “Institutional Effectiveness,” accessed June 8, 2016, [http://uas.alaska.edu/ie/index.html?utm\\_campaign=ie-rollout&utm\\_source=migration&utm\\_medium=none](http://uas.alaska.edu/ie/index.html?utm_campaign=ie-rollout&utm_source=migration&utm_medium=none).
5. “Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education,” accessed June 8, 2016, [www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework](http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework). 