

STAYING *AU COURANT*: RESOURCES FOR INSTRUCTION LIBRARIANS

JANA VARLEJS

Librarians seeking to keep up with the latest thinking and literature about information literacy and library instruction can be easily overwhelmed. In addition to voluminous publications, there are conferences, workshops, electronic discussion lists, Web sites, etc. What are smart ways to keep up and separate the wheat from the chaff?

WHAT DO INSTRUCTION LIBRARIANS NEED TO KNOW?

The objectives of this session of the LOEX 2006 conference were for participants to be able to identify a modest range of resources to use for their own continuing professional development as well as for training and mentoring new instruction librarians, and to be able to relate these to the knowledge base that instruction librarians ideally should have. The recently posted draft of "Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians" by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) at <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrlbucket/is/newsacrl/proficienciescall.htm> served as a starter for discussion of what academic librarians need to know and be able to do. The draft outlines twelve broad proficiencies in alphabetical order:

- Administrative ability
- Assessment and evaluation skills
- Communication skills
- Curriculum knowledge
- Information literacy integration skills
- Instructional design skills
- Planning ability
- Presentation skills
- Promotion skills
- Subject expertise
- Teaching skills
- Teamwork & leadership skills

While there was not enough time to delve into the draft details, the LOEX conference audience quickly agreed that some additional categories should be considered: technology, especially multimedia; intellectual property and academic integrity; marketing rather than only promotion; and knowledge of the higher education environment and the changing characteristics of the student body.

Another way of thinking about what instruction librarians need to keep up with is to consider the organizational and social, as well as the professional context in which they practice. The following list overlaps with the "Proficiencies," but goes well beyond them:

- The instruction librarian's own library's policies, services, technology, staff, etc.
- His/her own institutional context (faculty, students, culture, etc.)
- Relevant subject expertise
- Evolving professional knowledge and skills in librarianship/ instructional librarianship
- Advances in education--learning theory, cognitive science, adolescent development, learning styles, culture and learning, online education
- Trends and issues in higher education
- Innovations in information/communication technology
- Societal/generational change

In short, there is an enormous amount of environmental scanning, technical know-how, research and professional literature to cover if one is to develop and maintain all the skills and knowledge that an instructional librarian needs. Continual and focused effort is required in order to keep up, hone skills, and build one's knowledge base.

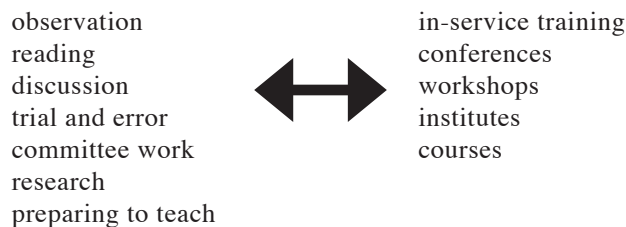
HOW DO PROFESSIONALS KEEP UP?

It is important to recognize that much of our ongoing learning is incidental and informal, as we constantly adjust our understanding and practice skills as part of our daily routines. By

VARLEJS

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

forming the habit of regular reflection, this tacit learning can be made explicit and organized for more effective recall and use. Even deliberate learning projects are more frequently conducted through informal means rather than through formal continuing education (Auster & Chan, 2004; Varlejs, 1999a & b). We can picture a continuum of informal to formal methods:



Over the last two decades, the resources available for anyplace-anytime learning have exploded dramatically, thanks to the ubiquitous PC, digital libraries, and the Internet. It is now hard to imagine how we communicated and shared knowledge before the advent of such remarkable conduits as electronic discussion lists. Increasingly, short seminars and workshops are available as webcasts from professional organizations. Training in many technical skills is readily found on the Internet through clearinghouses such as WebJunction.

WHAT ARE SOME ELECTRONIC DISCUSSION LISTS USEFUL TO INSTRUCTION LIBRARIANS?

The first one below is considered by many to be indispensable:

The Information Literacy Instruction List--ILLI-L: Formerly the BI-L listserv; sponsored by the Instruction Section of the Association of College and Research Libraries. To subscribe, send a blank e-mail message to subscribe-ili-l@ala.org with your first and last name as the subject. If that does not work, e-mail lpweb-admin@ala.org. INFOLIT (infolit@ala.org)

The Information Literacy Discussion List--INFOLIT: Recently established forum for school, academic, and public librarians to exchange ideas on information literacy programs and experiences that demonstrate a collaborative relationship between K-12 and higher education institutions. See FAQ at <http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslproftools/aasledislist/INFOLIT.htm> To subscribe, send a blank e-mail message to subscribe-infolit@ala.org with your first and last name as the subject. Jointly owned by the American Association of School Libraries (aasl@ala.org) and the Association of College and Research Libraries (acrl@ala.org),

Nettrain: Discussion list for Internet trainers; for instructions on how to subscribe, go to <http://listserv.acsu.buffalo.edu/cgi-bin/wa?SUBED1=nettrain&A=1>

WHICH LIBRARY JOURNALS OFTEN CARRY ARTICLES ON INSTRUCTION AND INFORMATION LITERACY?

Now that so many periodicals are online, it is easier and less expensive for librarians to regularly monitor the literature for pertinent articles and reviews. Key library journals for instruction librarians are:

- College & Research Libraries*
- Journal of Academic Librarianship*
- Portal*
- Reference & User Services Quarterly*
- Reference Services Review*
- Research Strategies*

News sources include:

- C&RL News* <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/crlnews/collegeresearch.htm>
- ACRLLog* <http://acrlblog.org>
- LIRT News* <http://www3.baylor.edu/LIRT>
- LOEX Currents and Quarterly* <http://www.emich.edu/public/loex>
- CLENEExchange Newsletter* <http://www.ala.org/ala/clenert/newsletter/newsletter.htm>
- ACRL Instruction Section News* <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/aboutacrl/acrlsections/instruction/homepage.htm>
- OCLC News* <http://www.oclc.org/news/default.htm>

The CLENE Round Table's newsletter is intended for continuing education and staff development providers, and therefore has material that to some extent is useful to instruction librarians also. The OCLC news releases are a good source of links to new research reports from organizations such as Pew, which study Internet and other information use by young people as well as the general public.

Because the periodical literature and online sources come to mind as the most up-to-date sources for staying abreast of what we need to know, we should not neglect the monographic literature. There are excellent books on instruction librarianship and information literacy, but they fall outside the scope of this "quick-fix" review.

USING CURRENT AWARENESS/ALERTING SERVICES

There are of course many more useful journals and newsletters, but the point of this overview is to keep the number manageable. A very efficient way to cherry-pick the literature is to create a personalized current awareness service. *Ingenta* is a huge database that allows one to specify a number of searches that are conducted automatically every week, with results e-mailed to the user. Table-of-contents (TOC) alerts for selected journals also can be requested for e-mail delivery. If *Ingenta* is not available, check to see if the journals you are interested in might not offer to e-mail the TOC to you upon publication. *The Informed Librarian*, <http://informedlibrarian.com>, provides access to TOCs and other services for \$29 a year. If you have access to the *Journal*

of *Academic Librarianship*, their “Guide to the Professional Literature” column is a quick way to catch some of the highlights. To make sure you have not missed anything of importance, turn to the annual bibliography published in *Reference Services Review* (Johnson, 2005). At the very least, consult the American Library Association’s Library Instruction Round Table’s annual top twenty article picks (<http://www3.baylor.edu/LIRT>).

Rather than relying on your own personal updating system, you might want to create a cooperative project at your library. For example, if you hold regular instructional staff meetings, ten minutes or so might be set aside each time for sharing synopses of articles or books read and/or conferences or workshops attended. Or, you might want to create a journal club, with everyone committed to scanning a certain number of journals and sharing the gist of pertinent content over a weekly brown bag lunch. Alternatively, you could create a blog or wiki for this purpose (see WebJunction for guidance at <http://www.webjunction.org/do/Navigation?category=11233>). For an example of a wiki for instruction librarians, see <http://instructionwiki.org>. For background on current awareness, see Barr, 2006.

Once set with your trusted current awareness system, it is easy to forget that not every useful item is going to be caught in the net. When a specific question arises or there is a need to explore a particular aspect of library instruction or information literacy, remember to turn to the indexes (H.W. Wilson’s Library Literature, LISA, LISTA, ERIC, and Education Index).

WHAT ARE QUICK WAYS TO KEEP AN EYE ON DEVELOPMENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

This leads us to the importance of keeping up with trends and issues in higher education. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* is the first choice. Two journals that are likely to be useful to instruction librarians, both for their faculty perspective and their practical teaching insights, are *College Teaching and Teacher Professor*. A blog that provides a quick way to stay up to date on higher education is Steven Bell’s “The Kept-up Academic Librarian,” <http://staff.philau.edu/bells/keepup>, which abstracts current news and provides links to articles. For publications from Educause, an association whose mission is to “advance higher education by promoting the intelligent use of information technology,” see www.educause.edu. You should be able to set up the alerting services provided by Steven Bell and Educause by using RSS feeds (Really Simple Syndication), which alert you to new information on the Web pages that you select. To learn about RSS, see <http://www.llrx.com/features/rssforlibrarians.htm>.

USEFUL WEB SITES

There are many Web pages useful to instruction librarians. The most important one to monitor regularly is ACRL’s Instruction Section and their separate page on information literacy, with its links to the Information Literacy Institute. There is now also an ACRL blog that you can receive automatically and thus keep up with the bigger picture as well (<http://www.acrlblog.org>). If you belong to ACRL, you have access to the members-only “Updated Internet Resources” at <http://ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlpubs/crlnews/internetresources.htm>. This includes “Information literacy sites,” a comprehensive, annotated listing, with links, to organizations and conferences, guidelines and reports, initiatives and programs, tutorials, discussion forums/groups and blogs, journals and articles, partnerships and collaboration, intellectual property, technology, and assessment. Once you have explored the limited resources I have suggested in this presentation and want to explore further, this ACRL compilation by Esther Grassian and Michael Oppenheim is THE one to use as a touchstone.

For examples of tutorials and other learning materials, there are a number of choices: LOEX; PRIMO, Peer-Reviewed Instructional Materials Online, which features tutorials, is at <http://www.ala.org/ala/acrlbucket/iscommittees/webpages/emergingtech/primo/index.htm>; and the new International Information Literacy Resources Directory is at http://www.uv.mx/usbi_ver/unesco. The above mentioned instruction wiki has a section on teaching resources. Not specific to library instruction, but worth exploring are <http://www.merlot.org> and <http://www.wisc-online.com>, which is described by Deborah Diller elsewhere in these proceedings.

There are Web sites intended for college teachers that can be very helpful to instruction librarians who have to teach across the curriculum, as they lead to resources in disciplines. See for example, the Center for Support of Teaching and Learning at Syracuse <http://cstl.syr.edu>, which in turn leads to the University of Michigan’s Center for Research on Learning and Teaching’s “Teaching Strategies and Disciplinary Resources.”

WHAT ARE THE MAIN CONFERENCES & WORKSHOPS?

If you are looking for formal learning opportunities, the ACRL Immersion Institute is acclaimed as the gold standard for in-depth learning. The annual LOEX conference also has an excellent track record and produces proceedings, published by Pierian Press. At ALA conferences, the ACRL Instruction Section and the Library Instruction Round Table (LIRT) present programs. Every other year there is a LOEX-of-the-West conference, and in Canada there is an Annual Workshop on Instruction in Library Use (WILU). For the numerous regional conferences, see the Grassian and Oppenheim listing mentioned above. A related annual symposium on intellectual property issues is held annually at the University of Maryland. Short workshops are available online

from ACRL, frequently in the form of webcasts in collaboration with the TLT Group (see <http://www.TLTgroup.org/OLI/Schedule.htm>). An increasing number of online courses that might be helpful to instruction librarians are available through WebJunction, and there are many regional and local organizations across the country that provide workshops.

HOW DO WE KEEP UP WITH GENERATIONAL CHANGE?

In addition to monitoring the spheres of librarianship and higher education, instruction librarians also need to think about how different the current generation is from those closer to their own. Teaching methods that may have worked a decade ago, may be ineffective with young people who have grown up on video games and instant messaging. Once we start to think about this, it is easy to pick up on news items in the media about young people and technology that help us to stay “au courant.” There are also some deliberate efforts to alert us to pendulum swings, such as Beloit College’s annual “mindset” list at <http://beloit.edu/~pubaff/mindset>, and Richard Sweeney’s “Millenials” Web site at <http://www.library.njit.edu/staff-folders/sweeney>.

CONCLUSION

One hour was not enough time to adequately discuss and vote on the most indispensable resources and the most urgent “keep-up-with” topics. Insofar as a consensus could emerge, the ILI-L discussion list, the ACRL blog, and *Research Strategies* appeared to be the favorite resources, and technology was the topic demanding the most constant vigilance.

REFERENCES

- Auster, E. & Chan, D.C. (2004). Reference librarians and keeping up-to-date. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 44(1), 57-66.
- Barr, D. (2006, January). Staying alert: The wild new world of current awareness services. *C&RL News*, 67(1), 14-17.
- Johnson, A.M. (2005). Library instruction and information literacy literature—2004. *Reference Services Review*, 33(4), 487-530.
- Varlejs, J. (1999a). Profile of the academic librarian as self-directed learner. In P.O. Libutti (Ed.), *Librarians as learners, librarians as teachers: The diffusion of Internet expertise in the academic library* (pp. 51-65). Chicago: Association of College and Research Libraries.
- Varlejs, J. (1999b). On their own: Librarians’ self-directed, work-related learning. *Library Quarterly*, 69(2), 173-201.