

# GRACEFULLY DANCING THE TWO-STEP: STRATEGIES FOR HIGHLIGHTING LIBRARIANS AS INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNERS

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Recent professional presentations of a unique three-person library-based Instructional Design (ID) team have evoked a librarian fear of stepping on faculty members' toes: "They are the teachers; they are the content experts. How can a librarian advise professors in more effective teaching methods?" At SUNY Geneseo, the ID team has developed a multi-pronged approach for faculty outreach where professors are introduced to new interactive teaching techniques. Methods include informal modeling of pedagogical creativity in the library classroom; training instruction librarians in collaborative and interactive technologies to be used in their class sessions; one-on-one faculty consultations; and intentional workshops that tackle one technology at a time, including discussion on how students and faculty can interact with the highlighted tool. Various communication techniques are listed throughout the following narrative of the Milne Library ID team's development and growth and are further highlighted in the article's Appendix.

## THE CHALLENGE

SUNY Geneseo, a residential liberal arts college providing mostly face-to-face classroom instruction, has seen an exponential growth in the number of online course offerings in the past five years (three courses in 2008 compared to 45 courses in 2012). This increase is remarkable considering that online courses are only offered during the summer and that the campus culture does not look enthusiastically upon the word "online." The unexpected growth in online course offerings has caught the College by surprise and has caused strain on the various support services, especially technology. Support has been in existence from the start but in a very ad hoc manner; there is no office or staff member solely dedicated to supporting online courses and/or the faculty who teach them. The College's approach to online instruction has been very "organic." The program is run by the Office of the Dean responsible for approving course proposals and scheduling.

Computing & Information Technology (CIT) has been offering training on the Learning Management System (LMS) as well as coordinating an annual workshop for pedagogy. Paralleling the lack of a centralized office for distance learning, the campus has not officially provided instructional design services.

## A SLOW START

Not aware of it at the time, the library's roots within ID were planted almost a year before an official instructional design team was established. In Spring 2010, two Milne librarians attended a locally sponsored workshop featuring a professor knowledgeable about online learning and best practices in pedagogy. This first-time workshop, organized by CIT, was designed to address faculty's concerns over delivering online courses, many of whom were novices to teaching in this manner. The librarians, acknowledging the faculty's uncertainty, felt it was important to let them know that in addition to CIT support (workshops and LMS training), the library would also provide assistance. CIT was pleasantly surprised and grateful for this offer (as most support was provided by them) and asked the librarians to attend the next training session and deliver a brief presentation. Although the librarians were given only five minutes to describe the services the library could offer (e.g., previewing courses, enhanced ILL services), this opened the door to future workshops and collaborations between the library and CIT. Auspiciously, one of the librarians invited to speak would later become part of the ID team.

In the first summer after the five-minute presentation, several of the librarians were asked by faculty to help with their online courses. A few librarians engaged in previewing courses, while others created specialty research guides. Although involvement was minimal, the efforts showcased a sampling of what librarians could offer to faculty. As a result, the Library Director approached several Milne staff members to ask them

to develop and promote ID initiatives on campus. In January 2011, the ID team was formed. The official team was comprised of three librarians, each with a unique background and special strengths. The team further partnered with CIT and the Teaching and Learning Center (TLC) to form a larger ID support group for the campus. Through periodic meetings, the three departments began learning more about each other and the services each department offered. The goal was to eliminate any preconceived ideas and assumptions about the other departments. Through conversations and discussions, the pre-existing walls slowly started to break down.

The ID team and larger group were aware of the campus culture and its resistance to online learning, realizing that any changes or initiatives would need to occur gradually and thoughtfully. Concurrently, the librarians were unsure of how faculty would respond to offers of instructional design support as professors are *the* experts in their field of study and should have a good understanding of pedagogy. Fortunately, almost immediately after the team's formation, they were given the opportunity to develop and virtually deliver library instruction for a gateway psychology class. They created an online tutorial (<http://libguides.geneseo.edu/psyc251>) that could be used in place of the regularly scheduled one-shot instruction session. This PRIMO (Peer-Reviewed Instructional Materials Online) award-winning guide became the first of many created by the team and marked the beginning of formalized ID efforts on campus.

## **BUILDING CAPACITY**

The team quickly realized that Milne's strong library instruction program and close working relationships with faculty would be a key ingredient in expanding ID efforts. Based on this, the "librarian as ambassador" idea was conceptualized. The theory behind librarian ambassadors was to train them in interactive tools that increase student engagement which they would later expose to faculty during the course of their regular library-focused teaching. A summer series of informal technology talks was scheduled where each workshop introduced a new technology (e.g., Diigo, Animoto, Google Docs). The presenter-of-the-day demonstrated to their colleagues the mechanics of a chosen tool and gave concrete examples of how it could be used successfully in classrooms, whether in-person or virtually. Assessment results showed that not only were librarians using the tools in their classes that following fall semester but that faculty were also implementing the technologies in their own teaching, asking about the apps, or sharing the tools with students and colleagues.

Feeling confident in their ability to create supportive resources and deliver successful workshops, the ID team created a new guide for professors who were teaching online courses. It highlighted resources and services (e.g., ILL, previewing course structure, clarity and flow) available for faculty and enrolled students. It also listed the currently offered courses and the librarian assigned to help that faculty member with the class, facilitating easy access to support. The guide was utilized in a 90-minute training workshop delivered by several

librarians, including two of the ID team members (a big increase in time from the brief presentation the previous year). The workshop presenters emphasized the various services and resources the library offered and also introduced faculty to some of the technologies showcased in the summer technology talks.

The "librarian as ambassador" idea blossomed as librarians were again asked by faculty to assist with their summer online courses. This time, one of the librarians was fully embedded in a faculty member's course, responsible for monitoring message boards, assisting with assignment creation, and exploring and utilizing interactive technologies. With librarians helping faculty create class assignments/activities and suggesting appropriate technology to deliver online content, the Library could move away from simply providing assistance to delivering ID and pedagogical support and advice. While the librarians were offering help with course design and educational technology advice, CIT continued to support faculty in the use of the campus' LMS. Without this partnership, neither group could have offered faculty the variety and quantity of assistance needed.

## **GOING INTERNATIONAL**

In Spring 2011, the Library Director asked one of the three ID team librarians to serve, as required, on the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) team. COIL aims to pair faculty across SUNY to develop courses that are team taught with a partner abroad and enrolls students both from SUNY campuses and from the partner institution.<sup>1</sup> The COIL team needed to consist of collaborating professors, an international studies representative, and an instructional designer/technologist. With Corey Ha's educational technologies expertise, he was the perfect choice to attend the COIL Conference. Mr. Ha had the opportunity to share the growing number of services and teaching-to-technology experiences that the ID team was developing back on campus.

It took some time, reflection and experimentation with options within the online format before the COIL faculty member representing SUNY Geneseo contacted the team for a brainstorming session. Although she had established previous working relationships with each ID team member, the professor's independent work preference had to be put aside if she were to discover new ways of engaging the American and Russian students in a digital environment. The first of three meetings provided a fruitful beginning. The ID team was conscious of not trying to restructure any aspect of the COIL course or make suggestions that would lead either professor outside of their comfort zones. The team's role was simply to listen to what had already been structured, consider pre-determined learning outcomes, brainstorm ways in which an activity could accomplish a learning outcome and only then suggest a technology to facilitate the activity.

Two main activities were agreed upon to fill the remaining gaps on the COIL syllabi. The first employed Animoto, a video creation tool that mixes images with text and

sound. The learning objective was to create a community space in the first week that the American and Russian students virtually interfaced across countries/cultures. The professors modeled what an engaging personal introduction could look like via Animoto and students were asked to follow suit. Rather than words on a discussion board page, students saw each other's faces, followed each other's life stories, and shared common interests. The Animoto activity added unforeseen value to the COIL course as it bridged intercultural communication with pure language learning. More than what the professors could have anticipated, intercultural communication was surfacing in the ways in which students from the different countries introduced themselves in the form of carefully selected pictures, text and musical backdrop.

1. COIL, *A Brief History of the SUNY COIL Center*, <http://coil.suny.edu/page/brief-history-suny-coil-center> (2013).

The second activity was a DIVE (describe, interpret, verify, and evaluate) exercise, an activity used in communication classes to expose differences in perspective and understanding. The faculty member had used this exercise in her face-to-face classes, but was curious how this activity could translate from one country to another, especially with Geneseo and Moscow State students pairing up in teams. The ID team suggested the use of Voicethread, a spoken discussion board that allows for asynchronous recorded conversations centered around an image or text. Geneseo students posted a photo representing American life and Moscow State students recorded their description and interpretation of the image. In turn, Geneseo students replied back with their verification of what their Russian classmates had said and as a group, they evaluated the photo in the context of American life and Russian perspectives of American life. The same process happened with Moscow State students offering a photo representing Russian life. With Voicethread, students saw pictures of each other's faces and heard each other's voices. The technology created a more lively activity than if the exercise was delivered over a text-based discussion board. The interaction satisfied the original goals of the DIVE exercise and the Russian students were afforded an opportunity to practice their listening/speaking skills.

## MARKETING SUCCESS

The ID team's work with this COIL course proved successful in many ways. Grateful and inspired by the collaborative brainstorming and support, the Geneseo professor offered two presentations highlighting the value of the ID team's contributions. The first presentation was local, at the request of the ID team members where as a foursome, they shared the professor's story of success with other faculty members on campus. Several prospective online instructors attended the session and reported gaining new ideas. Independently, the same professor proposed a session at the 2012 National Communication Association conference where she presented the idea of personal introductions via Animoto. The positive response from that session will be published in the

forthcoming publication, *Teaching Communication Creatively*, Volume II, by Drs. Faith and William Mullen.

After the first COIL success on campus, two education professors sought help multiple times from the ID team in Fall 2012. These small group and one-on-one consultations between faculty and the ID team have increased in number, especially as professors prepare their online courses.

## COLLABORATING TO EXTEND OUTREACH EFFORTS

Pairing with professors to offer local workshops on pedagogical issues has become a growing endeavor germane to the ID team's outreach to Geneseo faculty. Members of the ID team have worked with an education professor, to offer a two-part workshop designed to transfer professors' lecture-style preference to a more hands-on, active learning approach. This transformative process was targeted to professors teaching in a traditional face-to-face setting but the ultimate goal was to slowly integrate a more engaging style of teaching if those courses were to migrate online.

All workshops are closely aligned with professional development events across campus. Workshops intentionally piggy-back on the offerings from CIT and TLC so that timing, communication, marketing and registration can be coordinated. Other workshops originated from the library's ID efforts: dedicated workshops offering library services to online faculty while highlighting useful educational technologies; a series of TLC-sponsored presentations that tie technology to teaching; collaboratively sponsored (CIT-TLC-ID) open discussion forums for prospective online teaching faculty; and a series of summer talks that span topics of teaching, technology, and scholarly communications. This last series has been developed by one of Milne's "librarian ambassadors" since the ID team's initial technology talks that took place in the summer of 2011. Impressed by the successful results of this series, recognizing the need for greater campus discussion on issues of scholarly communications, and in the spirit of "teaching it forward," the librarian ambassador has been able to expand the original audience of library instructors to now include the entire campus community. Communications and marketing for the various sessions are delivered from the library, but certainly complement the CIT and TLC events scheduled throughout the academic year. Milne librarians have discovered that they can generate larger audiences to events such as the informal library talks when personal e-mail invitations come from individual librarians. This is mostly based on the strong, established relationships existing between Milne Library and Geneseo's academic departmental faculty.

Finally, as relationships between the ID team, CIT, and TLC have strengthened and each entity has been identified as respective leaders in pedagogy, technology, and faculty culture, the groups are relying on each other to take ownership of various responsibilities that organize the campus' summer online program. For the first time since the ID team's evolution, the three members have accepted responsibility for arranging

the annual pedagogy workshop for online instructors in preparation for Summer 2013. As mentioned earlier, the ID team, CIT, and TLC have worked closely to align the schedules, marketing, and registration for various LMS and pedagogy workshops, and coordinated with the Dean's office to secure names of new instructors who are required to attend such training events.

As the number of individual ID consultations with professors has grown slowly from 2011, greater involvement in professional development efforts that prepare faculty for online teaching will help to expose the ID team as an essential support service on campus, thus increasing service levels and subsequently developing even more collaborative successes.

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## APPENDIX

### Tips and Strategies for Highlighting Librarians as Instructional Designers

1. Attend campus workshops and events a) to keep informed, but also b) to provide librarian visibility to the college faculty.
2. Speak up and offer assistance from the Library when it's obvious that there is a gap or lack in service on campus.
3. Seek out natural partners with whom to collaborate.
4. Coordinate meetings with your collaborators on a regular and frequent basis, beginning with conversations/activities that facilitate a better understanding about each other. This will help eliminate preconceived notions and misguided assumptions.
5. Consider your campus culture and discuss ways in which small movements toward change can be accomplished.
6. Take a step outside of your comfort zone to accept new challenging projects. As a team, the creative and pragmatic ideas will flourish.
7. Take stock in and play up your library's strengths as they relate to the wider campus community.
8. Provide your staff/team with opportunities to gain new knowledge in fun and meaningful ways.
9. Model the instructional strengths and innovative (and integrated) course design that your team brings to the library classroom.
10. Provide alternate ways for faculty to learn about the services the Library has to offer - in-person workshops, attend departmental meetings, market customized guides, direct e-mail contact, etc.
11. Make a personal connection between professor and librarian liaison so that there is only one main contact for future communication.
12. Test workshop ideas within the Library and then, once comfortable, share the training at a campus-wide level.
13. Even if it's a stretch outside of one's comfort zone (and increases workload temporarily), show professors what teaching assistance a librarian can offer.
14. Decide where each collaborators' strengths lie and divide the work where most appropriate.
15. Understand and respect professors' individual work habits and varying degrees of openness to collaboration before making any assumptions.
16. Proceed slowly and with baby steps as you gauge professors' receptiveness to new ideas.
17. Publicize your successes across campus by organizing events and workshops, writing blog posts and newsletter articles, sharing triumphs in informal conversations with professors, etc.
18. By being part of an organized project (e.g., COIL), the ID team's support is becoming institutionalized as new proposals require the name of an instructional designer/educational technologist, and through successful experiences, the team is now recommended as part of the COIL teaching process.

19. Leverage the credibility of excellent professors on campus by working with them. While a growing ID team may not be seen by faculty as a reputable source for pedagogical assistance, the work and results shown in tandem with professors known for good teaching will stand out.
20. Be sure to work together with your collaborators rather than working against each other. Coordinate schedules and marketing so that a small three-person ID team is seen as part of a larger entity, all in the purpose of providing online teaching support.
21. Sometimes the personalized, more individual touch can yield more positive responses especially when e-mail inboxes are cluttered with campus-wide announcements.