Where Did (S)he Get Those *Skills*? An Investigation of ACRL's Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians

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Over the past two decades, information literacy instruction has become a significant part of many academic librarians' duties. In particular, as the electronic environment becomes more inundated with information and the skills required to conduct research at the college level become more complex, librarians play an important role in helping students gain the necessary skills to navigate, understand and assess this vast world of information. Students often develop these skills through instruction sessions led by librarians or research instruction integrated throughout an entire course, but where are librarians acquiring the skills necessary to be competent and effective teachers? Are library schools preparing future librarians for their roles as classroom instructors, or are librarians primarily acquiring these skills on the job through trial and error?

In 1985, the ACRL Bibliographic Instruction Section defined Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians (1985). A primary purpose of this document was to advise library schools in their curriculum and course planning. In 1993, Shonrock and Mulder used the Proficiencies as a basis for discovering what skills library instructors found the most useful in their jobs. They asked instruction librarians how and when they acquired these skills and when they would have liked to acquire them. They discovered that librarians were largely learning these skills on the job, but would have preferred to have learned them in library school (1993).

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In December 2004, the ACRL IS Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians Task Force was formed and was charged to:

- Develop a list of proficiencies required of instruction librarians and other librarians, focusing on broad areas rather than a comprehensive list of skills

- Outline a way to assist individuals and organizations in selecting the proficiencies most appropriate for their environment

- Design the document in a manner that would lend itself to publication as an ACRL standard or guideline (2007)

In June 2007, the Instruction Section of ACRL approved the new set of proficiencies for instruction librarians: Association of College and Research Libraries Standards for Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators (2007). Using this new list of proficiencies as a reference point, Shonrock and Mulder's 1993 study was recreated by the authors in order to investigate the changes that have occurred in this realm over the past two decades.

Results were analyzed to begin determining how, over the past 14 years, library schools have used the 1985 Proficiencies and Shonrock and Mulder's recommendations to make adjustments to their programs and address the needs of future instruction librarians.

Research Method

In Phase 1 of their study, Shonrock and Mulder asked respondents to rank the importance of each of the 84 proficiencies. They used a 5-point Likert scale: *essential*, *very important*, *important*, *of little importance*, and *not important*.

Additionally, respondents were given *don't know/don't have* as an option. Their goal was to identify the 25 most important proficiencies to instruction librarians. Fourteen of the top 25 proficiencies were from three areas: Communication Skills, Instructional Ability, and Planning Ability, with 6 of the top 25 from the Communication Skills area.

In Phase 2 of their study, they took the 25 most important proficiencies (as identified in Phase 1) and asked "For each proficiency, please indicate the most significant source from which you acquired it *and* the most significant source from which you believe a librarian *should* acquire it." The choices were: Library School, Other Formal Education, Continuing Education, Mentor, On the Job, Self-Taught, and Don't know/ Don't have (1993).

In the authors' investigation of the June 2007 proficiencies, the proficiencies specific to coordinators of instruction were omitted. The authors solicited respondents from a number of information literacy-related listservs, including the ILI-L list. Respondents were asked to rank the importance of the 41 remaining proficiencies. There was little variance in the mean scores of all 41 proficiencies, and since they all ranked highly, all 41 proficiencies were used in Phase 2. The general high ranking of the proficiencies underscores the relevance and perceived importance of the Association of College and Research Libraries Standards for Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators.

The authors' design of Phase 2 was an exact replica of Shonrock and Mulder's Phase 2. Additionally, both studies collected demographic information, including years of involvement in instruction and prior teaching experience.

A Comparison of Studies: 1993 and 2008

Where are librarians acquiring proficiencies?

Shonrock and Mulder found that, of the 25 "most important" proficiencies, 16 were acquired primarily on the job (64%), seven were acquired primarily via self-teaching (28%), and two were primarily acquired in library school (8%). In comparison, the study of the new proficiencies found that of the 41 proficiencies, 37 were acquired primarily on the job (90%), four were acquired primarily via self-teaching (10%), and none were acquired primarily in library school (0%).

Where do librarians prefer to acquire proficiencies?

Shonrock and Mulder found that, of the 25 proficiencies, all were primarily preferred to be acquired in library school (13), on the job (7), or through other formal education (5). Similarly, the new study found that, of the 41 proficiencies, all were primarily preferred to be acquired in library school (27), on the job (12), via continuing education (1), or through a mentor (1). In both studies, self-teaching was not a primary preferred learning method for any proficiency.

In both studies, it is clear that librarians show a strong preference to acquire proficiencies in library school. However, very few skills were acquired primarily in library school (only two proficiencies in the 1993 study and none in 2008). In 1985, more of the proficiencies were general and only tangentially related to instruction, which might mean that they were more likely to have been acquired in library school.

Are Library Schools Adapting to the Needs of Instruction Librarians?

In order to address whether or not library schools are adapting to the needs of instruction librarians, responses from librarians with less than two years of involvement in instruction were analyzed and compared to responses from the entire set and to responses from librarians with more than ten years of involvement in instruction.

Librarians with less than two years of involvement in instruction reported acquiring five proficiencies primarily in library school, along with five proficiencies via another form of formal education. In comparison, when looking at the full set of respondents collectively, none of the proficiencies were reported to have been learned primarily in library school or via other formal education. Of these ten proficiencies, four are from the instructional design skills category (see Appendix A).

Additionally, there were 11 proficiencies that over 50% of the full set of respondents felt should be acquired primarily in library school (see Appendix B). For these 11 proficiencies, whether or not a proficiency was acquired in library school correlated with the amount of time the respondent had been involved in instruction: Those with fewer years of involvement in instruction showed a higher likelihood of having acquired these proficiencies in library school, indicating that library school programs are beginning to adjust curricula to meet some of the needs of future instruction librarians. Eight of these 11 proficiencies were acquired primarily in library school or via another form of formal education in the subset of respondents with less than two years of involvement in instruction. However, it is important to note that those with fewer years of involvement in instruction are possibly more inclined to indicate acquiring a proficiency in library school because they have had less time to acquire the skills elsewhere.

Shonrock and Mulder found that "for all 25 proficiencies, more respondents thought they should have acquired the proficiency in library school than actually did acquire them in library school. For eleven proficiencies, the difference between the percentage who acquired the skill in library school and the percentage who thought it should have been acquired there was greater than 25 percent" (1993). Similarly, in the 2008 study, more respondents thought they should have acquired the proficiency in library school than actually did acquire them in library school; this was true for all 41 proficiencies. However, there was greater discrepancy and for more proficiencies than in the previous study. Out of the 41 proficiencies, 28 had a discrepancy of over 25% and 9 of those 28 were greater than 50% (see Appendix C).

Respondents with less than two years of involvement

in instruction reported much lower differences. The difference was greater than 25% for 19 proficiencies, and only one of those 19 had a difference of more than 50%. In contrast, respondents with more than ten years of involvement in instruction reported much greater differences. For 32 of the proficiencies, the difference was greater than 25% and 15 of these had a difference of more than 50%.

What Skills Can Librarians Focus on When Creating In-House Professional Development Programs?

Ten of the 41 proficiencies rose to the top when considering proficiencies that would be appropriate targets for in-house professional development programming (see Appendix D). In order to populate this list, proficiencies that were acquired primarily on the job or via self-education but preferred to be acquired elsewhere were targeted.

Librarians reported to have acquired 37 of the 41 proficiencies primarily on the job and the other 4 primarily via self-education. Of the 37 acquired primarily on the job, 12 were proficiencies that librarians indicated that they *preferred* to acquire on the job. For another 19 of the proficiencies acquired primarily on the job, librarians indicated a secondary preference of acquiring them on the job. The remaining six proficiencies, along with the self-taught proficiencies (none of which were preferred to be acquired on the job), were all good candidates for professional development programming. Of the ten remaining, two were proficiencies that librarians with less than two years experience in instruction report acquiring primarily in library school. Five had a mean over 4.02 (from Phase 1), indicating their importance in the top-half of proficiencies.

The top five proficiencies are from the teaching skills and presentation skills categories, indicating a need for more training in pedagogical technique and creativity. Interestingly, for librarians with teaching experience, only five of these ten proficiencies were acquired via other formal education. Additionally, eight were identified by librarians as those they would like to have acquired via continuing education (one primary, seven secondary).

Conclusion

A comparison of the 1993 study to the 2008 study shows

• The Standards for Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators, approved by the ACRL Board in 2007, are much more relevant to Instruction Librarians than the Core and Advanced Competencies for Library Instructors & Coordinators, defined in 1985.

• Library schools seem to be better preparing librarians for their instruction responsibilities.

• The proficiencies can be used by administrators and to

focus professional development opportunities.

In future analysis, it will be important to evaluate the course offerings of library schools to fully understand the changes that have been made at the programmatic level. Additionally, analysis of program curricula is necessary to identify true alignment with the Proficiencies.

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APPENDIX A: SUBSET OF LIBRARIANS INVOLVED IN INSTRUCTION FOR LESS THAN TWO YEARS

Five proficiencies were acquired primarily in library school

5.1 Describes role of information literacy in academia

6.4 Assists learners to assess their information needs, differentiate among sources and develop skills to effectively identify, locate, and evaluate

6.7 Integrates appropriate technology into instruction to support experiential and collaborative learning / improve student receptiveness, comprehension, and retention

9.2 Presents instructional content in diverse ways and selects appropriate delivery methods

11.1 Keeps current with basic theories, methodologies, and topics in assigned and related subject areas and incorporates those ideas when planning instruction

Five proficiencies were acquired primarily through other formal education

3.1 Maintains awareness of communication needs of different learning styles, and adjusts own style and methods accordingly

6.2 Sequences information in a lesson plan to guide the instruction session

6.3 Creates learner-centered content and incorporates activities directly tied to learning outcomes

12.1 Creates a learner-centered teaching environment by utilizing active, collaborative, and other learning activities

12.2 Modifies teaching methods and delivery to address the diverse needs of student learners

APPENDIX B: PROFICIENCIES (ABBREVIATED) THAT OVER 50% OF ALL RESPONDENTS FELT SHOULD BE LEARNED PRIMARILY IN LIBRARY SCHOOL

2.1 Assessment design

6.4 Teaching research process

5.1 Advocating for info lit

6.2 Create lesson plans

3.1 Understand learning styles

9.2 Deliver instruction in diverse ways (written, oral, visual, online, or using presentation software)

6.6 Understands level of learners being instructed

12.2 Accommodate learning styles in teaching

6.3 Outcomes-based learning

12.1 Active/collaborative learning

8.1 Lesson plans/time management

1993

Ability to distinguish different levels of bibliographic instruction

Ability to design curriculum for the goal

Ability to match instructional method to given objective

Ability to verbalize search strategy

Ability to match instructional method to a given academic level

2008 (*see Figure 1*)

(2.1) Designs effective assessments of student learning and uses the data to guide one's teaching and professional development

(6.2) Sequences information in a lesson plan to guide the instruction session

(3.1) Maintains awareness of communication needs of different learning styles, and adjusts own communication style and methods accordingly

(6.6) Designs instruction to best meet the common learning characteristics of learners, including prior knowledge/experience, motivation, cognitive abilities, etc.

(12.2 Modifies teaching methods and delivery to address the diverse needs of student learners

Figure 1: Proficiencies with the Greatest Differences (2008)
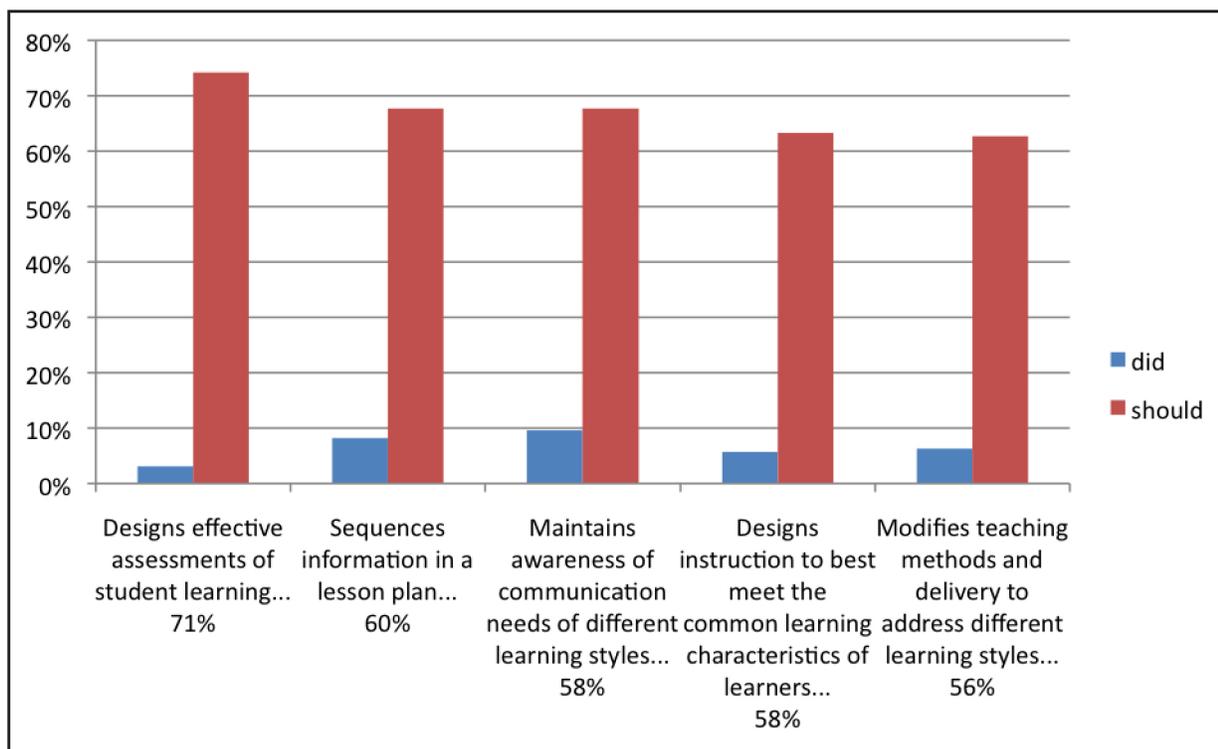
APPENDIX D: TARGET PROFICIENCIES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mean	Category	Proficiency
4.15	Presentation Skills	Makes the best possible use of voice, eye contact, and gestures to keep class lively and students engaged.
4.13	Teaching Skills	Reflects on practice in order to improve teaching skills and acquires new knowledge of teaching methods and learning theories.
4.09	Teaching Skills	Modifies teaching methods and delivery to address different learning styles, language abilities, developmental skills, age groups, and the diverse needs of student learners.
4.08	Teaching Skills	Creates a learner-centered teaching environment by utilizing active, collaborative, and other appropriate learning activities.
4.07	Presentation Skills	Presents instructional content in diverse ways (written, oral, visual, online, or using presentation software) and selects appropriate delivery methods according to class needs.*
4.01	Instructional Design Skills	Collaborates with classroom faculty by defining expectations and desired learning outcomes in order to determine appropriate information literacy proficiencies and resources to be introduced in library instruction.
4.01	Communication Skills	Maintains awareness of communication needs of different learning styles, and adjusts own communication style and methods accordingly.
3.93	Communication Skills	Communication Skills Leads or facilitates discussion of controversial or unexpected issues in a skillful, non-judgmental manner that helps students to learn.
3.82	Instructional Design Skills	Sequences information in a lesson plan to guide the instruction session, course, workshop, or other instructional material.
3.79	Subject Expertise	Keeps current with basic precepts, theories, methodologies, and topics in assigned and related subject areas and incorporates those ideas, as relevant, when planning instruction.*

*Proficiencies that librarians with less than two years of involvement in instruction acquired in library school.