

# CLASSROOM COLLABORATION: LIBRARIANS AND FACULTY TEACH THE ART OF RESEARCH

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## OVERVIEW

Traditionally, the relationship between writing faculty and librarians has been limited to the phone call or email sent to schedule an introduction to the library. The professor calls or emails the library, and *voilà*, students are set to learn all about what the library has to offer in the convenient space of a one-hour session or, for those lucky students, a one hour-and-fifteen-minute session.

That is the relationship that Kasia Leousis and Deanna Benjamin anticipated the first time they worked together. As Deanna, the faculty member, remembers it, Kasia's first question to her was: "What would you like me to cover?" It was the first time a librarian had offered to share the teaching responsibility with Deanna. She hadn't really thought about anything beyond what was typically covered in the basic hour-long introduction, so she told Kasia: "Do whatever you'd like."

And that was the start of their collaborative experience at Washington University in St. Louis. From there, Kasia and Deanna designed, tested, re-designed, and tested again ways to teach research to their students. They started by creating a structured one-hour introduction and hands-on session. This quickly shifted to a series of research-related class periods that incorporated a combination of program- and self-designed homework and in-class exercises.

Like most first-year composition courses, Writing 1

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is an ideal opportunity for librarian involvement because the students are developing information literacy skills that will serve them for the rest of their university careers. The course offers students their first experience with a research assignment at the university level, before upper-level and discipline-specific research begins. It also gives the students an opportunity to understand the role librarians play in facilitating the research process.

## COURSE AND PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Every section of Writing 1 is assigned a "class librarian" who is responsible for contacting the instructor and promoting services such as a bibliographic instruction session and a brief library orientation for undergraduate students. Each librarian has between one and five class sections and the course is capped at fourteen students. Most librarians arrange for an initial meet-and-greet with the class to introduce themselves and selected library resources, such as the library's catalog and Academic Search Premier. Many instructors are interested in a research instruction session and typically schedule it with the librarian in the computer lab.

Writing 1 is separated into three parts: close analysis, scholarly research, and presentation of findings. First, students analyze a self-determined primary text. These texts range from scenes on TV shows, in movies, or from books to music videos, songs, poems, and more. From their analysis, they write a four- to six-page close reading of their chosen text. With their conclusions, they begin the research process, producing both working and annotated bibliographies. One of the most essential tasks with this assignment is that students move away from their primary texts and look closely at the scholarship that addresses the ideas behind their conclusions. Finally, students give an oral presentation and a final paper where they incorporate research

into the analysis of the primary text.

## ELEMENTS OF COLLABORATION

At the beginning of their working relationship in the fall of 2008, Kasia and Deanna went through the expected elements of librarian-instructor interaction for Writing 1. Deanna's class came to the library, and Kasia taught them the traditional 50-minute bibliographic instruction session. As Kasia and Deanna reviewed their notes after the session, something clicked between them, and they spoke about trying to integrate more co-teaching and collaborative moments into the following semester's sections.

The new model of collaboration included thoughtfully scheduled meetings at key moments. Kasia and Deanna typically met twice before the semester started and about three or four times during the semester. These meetings included preparatory work for the research sessions and discussion of student assignments. Kasia first attended each class section during the second week of the semester. This was a chance for Kasia to learn names, majors, and an interesting fact about each student (e.g., the student's hometown). Instead of having the librarian drop into class and leave after fifteen minutes, Kasia and Deanna paired the introductions with class discussions of a text. In later semesters, Kasia led the class in an analysis of an advertisement (in preparation for one of the assignments).

They discovered that Kasia's co-teaching role at the beginning of the semester helped to establish her authority in the classroom. Kasia returned to the class a couple of weeks later, when students introduced their primary texts, at which time she learned their project interests and became more familiar with the students themselves. She and Deanna also introduced and analyzed the class text, a scene from the film *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. During this analysis, Kasia took the helm again, asking students to notice more specific patterns.

It was smooth sailing from there. Kasia's introduction of and participation in the research process was met with students engaged in what she had to say. Three days of team-teaching made up this second stage of the project.

**Day One:** Kasia and Deanna worked with the class primary text, each of them facilitating discussion and writing on the chalkboard.

**Day Two:** Kasia assigned an online homework assignment (see Appendix A), which was posted in a discussion forum (like Blackboard's Discussion Board). Based in part on the students' responses, she tailored a ten-minute introduction to the library's website, specifically addressing content areas and navigation tips. She then worked with the class to develop search terms for ideas generated on Day One. From here, students began their research in the computer lab.

**Day Three:** To begin the class, Kasia answered

questions and introduced ways to get sources. Students used the remainder of the class to conduct research, while Kasia and Deanna provided individual instruction.

In addition to leading these classes, Kasia set office hours for students who wanted or needed additional instruction. As the course came to an end, Kasia attended the oral presentations and revision workshops, after which she and Deanna discussed each student's progress to determine if Kasia needed to provide additional assistance. Kasia also reviewed the final projects at the end of the semester.

## OUR COLLABORATION BEFORE AND DURING THE SEMESTER

The ideal meeting schedule consists of three face-to-face meetings plus two meetings either in person or via email.

**The first meeting:** The librarian and professor discuss the assignment(s), the classes they will team-teach, and the roles each will play in those classes. Essentially, this is the time they talk about how they envision the semester's evolution and schedule the dates.

**The second meeting:** They discuss the goals of the first visit, articulate their roles in more concrete terms, and plan the librarian's first class appearance.

**The third meeting:** They discuss the students' projects in general; the professor brings the librarian up-to-date on the assignment and student progress on the projects; and, finally, they talk extensively about the research week. They determine the homework assignments in detail, what the librarian will cover, and how each day will unfold. In short, they finalize the schedule and exercises for the research classes.

**The fourth and fifth meetings:** After reviewing the working bibliographies, they identify students who need additional assistance.

## CONCLUSIONS

This collaboration has resulted in a stronger, more focused research process. Students select sources that are undoubtedly peer-reviewed and useful. They develop clear strands of thought, as demonstrated by the titles of the articles they find. Most importantly, they learn to navigate, independently, the research process.

Regarding the collaboration, Kasia and Deanna found assessment of the students' development of research and information literacy skills to be a critical part of the process. Student feedback, both pre- and post-research (see Appendices B and C), helps to guide the rest of the semester's instruction as well as future collaborative efforts. Kasia and Deanna also found that working together to modify and perfect instruction reinforced key concepts and ensured student-centered learning.

## READINGS

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## APPENDIX A (RESEARCH WEEK ASSIGNMENT\*)

This assignment has two threads. You will need to post under both of them. Before posting, you'll want to become familiar with the library's research guide: [provide URL]. Think of this as an exploration that is based, in part, on your expectations of the research process so far. To post your responses, simply click the "Post Reply" button. For additional instructions, go to the individual forums.

Forum #1: After you have explored the Library Research Guide, list two resources that you would like to learn more about or plan to use when investigating your primary texts.

Forum #2: List any questions you have about the guide. These questions can be general about the maneuverability of the guide or specific to your personal research experience.

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\* as posted on the online instructional platform

## APPENDIX B (PRE-RESEARCH QUESTIONS<sup>†</sup>)

What resources have you used at the university's libraries (e.g., books, journals, ejournals, interlibrary loan)?

Where do you usually begin your research?

Describe your basic research process (include a concrete example of a topic researched during high school or in your classes last semester)?

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<sup>†</sup> an anonymous method of self-assessment given to students at the librarian's first meeting with the class

## APPENDIX C (POST-RESEARCH SELF-EVALUATION<sup>‡</sup>)

Describe how your research process has changed as a result of your Writing 1 experience.

What about the research instruction proved most helpful?

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<sup>‡</sup> end-of-semester summative evaluation