

WE BUILT IT, THEY CAME, NOW WHAT? LESSONS LEARNED FROM CREATING A SUCCESSFUL COURSE INTEGRATED INFORMATION LITERACY PROGRAM

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INTRODUCTION

Course integrated instruction has been an ongoing program at Coastal Carolina University for over three decades. First known as bibliographic instruction, then library instruction and now information literacy, this program is continuously adapting to a changing educational and technological landscape. In the late 1990's, Coastal Carolina University began to see an exponential growth in the student population, going from 3,793 FTE in fall of 1997 to 7,117 FTE in fall of 2007 (Coastal, 2008). During the same period, the public services department expanded from three librarians with instructional responsibilities to six librarians and one graduate student/intern. Since 1997, the instructional program has grown by 68 percent and the number of students reached has grown 82 percent. In 2006-07, 332 sessions were conducted for 6,810 students.

For the past few years, we have been grappling with what happens to an instruction program when it becomes successful; when demand for sessions outstrips available teaching space, technologies and teachers. Much of the literature on instruction focuses on specifics of building programs or program components (Baker 2006, Durisin 2002, White 2002/03), but there is little on managing a program that has become so popular that there are not enough spaces in the instruction calendar to handle the demand. How do librarians build programs, sustain them, and then address the challenges of keeping a program moving forward?

BUILDING A PROGRAM

In reflecting on how we reached our current situation, there are several tangible and intangible elements that contributed to developing our program; these include:

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- **Supportive library administration:** adding additional faculty, securing funding for classrooms, equipment, furniture, and travel.
- **Continuing Education:** library and institutional support to attend ACRL's Immersion, LOEX, and other conferences and workshops.
- **Personnel:** hiring and training librarians who become enthusiastic and effective teachers.
- **Peer Mentoring:** informal support to new librarians.
- **Creative atmosphere:** librarians are given the freedom to experiment, to be creative and even to fail.
- **Time:** to build programs, to cope with failures and successes, to develop good working relationships with faculty.
- **Flexibility:** adapting quickly to change, whether it is in faculty, courses, University curriculum requirements, or with technology.
- **Responsive to changing technological environment:** don't have to be cutting edge, but creatively use technology to enhance learning.
- **Respect:** achieved by being responsive to needs of teaching faculty and designing sessions which support their instructional objectives.
- **Authentic collaboration with faculty:** assisting in design of research projects and incorporating instruction into course content.
- **Demonstrated student success:** quantitative through assessment and qualitative through faculty pleased with improvements in papers and research after instructional sessions.

- **Marketing:** aggressive, continual boosting of the instructional program, especially to new faculty
- **Partnerships:** with faculty, computer services, teaching effectiveness centers, other departments and administrative units to use instruction to achieve common goals and outcomes.

Over time, we have realized that on a smaller campus like Coastal, two of the most effective means of promoting the instruction program have been positive word of mouth and aggressive marketing to new faculty. The librarians are very proactive with their respective liaison areas. Office visits, flyers, emails, and impromptu discussions after meetings are some of the key ways instruction has been marketed. Additionally, the instruction librarians are diligent in building relationships with repeat instruction users. These devoted faculty members have been instrumental in generating buy in with new faculty. It is imperative that librarians are able to produce these kinds of “references” who can promote the library’s services in an unbiased manner. Similarly, the librarians are actively involved in presenting workshops through the new faculty orientation program each year. In addition, librarians offer collaborative faculty training sessions with the Technology in Education to Advance Learning (TEAL) Center and invite selected departments to participate in events like database training. Committees offer additional opportunities to network with faculty whom you might not come in contact with regularly. Finding unconventional ways of promotion have helped maintain interest across the semesters.

DEFINING SUCCESS

A successful information literacy program can be defined in several ways:

- Inclusion of information literacy concepts in courses
- Scope of disciplines participating in instruction program
- Measurable assessment
- Constant evolution
- Positive growth of the program
- Comparisons to peer institutions.

Coastal was part of the panel discussion on “Programs that Work” at the 1996 LOEX conference (Kirk et al, 1997). At that time, the library had only three instructional librarians, no classroom, no educational technology and no defined concept of information literacy. Despite these challenges, the program was very successful in marketing its instructional sessions to faculty. Since that time, we have introduced information literacy concepts to individual faculty and departments, with much of our success coming from new faculty. In 2006, our efforts paid off with the systematic introduction of these concepts into the new First

Year Experience (FYE) curriculum the library was helping to develop. Prior to this period, the instruction program had been concentrating its initial efforts on the two part freshman English sequence (English 101 & 102). Lacking a common syllabus, the library instruction component was never fully integrated into all sections. Since the FYE course was being completely redesigned, it provided the optimum opportunity to integrate information literacy as a required component of the course. Initially, it was anticipated that once our marketing efforts were concentrated on FYE that the participation levels of the English 101 and 102 courses would wane. However, the previous years of aggressive marketing paid off, as instructors still requested library instruction sessions with minimal amounts of solicitation. In total, during the 2006-07 academic year, the instruction program was able to reach 97 percent of all FYE sections, 84 percent of the English 101 sections, and 82 percent of the English 102 sections offered. In addition to high participation levels with first year programs, the library also saw an increase in upper division course sessions. Participation grew approximately 23 percent over the previous academic year, going from 68 sessions to 88. Overall, the total amount of library instruction increased 26 percent from 2005.

Our second measure of success in the program is the variety and scope of courses being taught. Upper division courses currently account for approximately 26 percent of our instruction requests. This figure has remained steady for several years with all four colleges participating in instruction on some level. Typically, English and Business courses account for the highest levels of disciplinary participation. A total of 18 disciplines received instruction during the course of the 2006-07 academic year.

Another measure of success is determined by the pre/post test assessment of first year students. Initially, the assessment of first year students was housed in the English 101 course. However, with the library’s shift in focus to FYE it seemed a natural move to shift the assessment as well. In 2006, students showed a statistically significant improvement on a total of 5 questions, three of which were focused on information literacy. In 2007, students improved on a total of 8 questions, six with an information literacy focus. The improvement between years demonstrates that the changes made to our teaching methodologies are working. Additionally, these results not only validate our program, but provide tangible evidence to justify information literacy’s inclusion into the FYE curriculum. Recently, we also conducted a small scale assessment of upper and lower division students using the Project SAILS test. Initial results indicate that our upper division students are on par with peer institutions, which reinforces the validity of our instructional methodologies.

The rapid growth of the instructional program, as mentioned earlier, has been 68 percent over ten years and 57 percent since 2000. Is growth a valid measure of a successful program? It can be, if taken in consideration with other factors. A longitudinal analysis of instructional statistics shows a program

adapting to changing educational programs and priorities. This constant evolution is a key component. Each year, we have an in-house meeting on “what did and did not work”. The information we gain is valuable in focusing our attention on revising various aspects of the program. Responses from these sessions have been used to develop new teaching strategies, new instructional exercises, and to improve existing spaces, policies, scheduling practices and record keeping. The annual student survey of library services is used to solicit student feedback on their perceptions of the instructional program. All data gathered through formal and informal methods is used for continual improvement. Peer comparison using NCES library statistics provides another assessment measure. Looking at 99 institutions with similar characteristics in 2004, our instruction program offered twice the number of sessions as the overall National and State averages, twice the comparison group mean and we were well above the comparison group’s average (Library Statistics Program, 2004).

CHALLENGES AND ISSUES:

It is exciting to see years of hard work and determination resulting in success, but how do you handle the demand from multiple constituencies? How do you prioritize your resources and staff? How do you conduct assessment and how do you use the results? If growth is an assessment measure, how much can your program grow? When do you determine what services to sacrifice in order to accommodate your information literacy mission? What happens when demand exceeds capacity? At what point do you say no? We now must deal with the multiple challenges that the expansion of our program has created.

Our external challenges include:

- **Strained campus resources:** Our campus enrollment is growing at an explosive rate. According to Coastal Carolina University’s Demographic Trends (2007), the number of first time freshmen increased 24.9 percent from 2004 to 2007.
- **Low Priority of University Administration:** Earlier administrations were not actively interested in library services and programs.
- **Campus disinterest in information literacy:** Information literacy is not a University wide initiative, although it is a small part of the Core Curriculum.

Internal challenges range from physical and staffing issues to the mind-set of students and instructors. They include:

- **Increased demand for sessions:** The growing number of first year students immediately impacted instruction. Within the next two years, this larger cohort will impact the demand for upper level instruction as more sections and new courses will need to be offered. The University is also planning an extensive expansion of majors in the coming years.

- **Number of computers available:** The number of laptops available for the instruction program has steadily increased to meet the demand. In 2004, we had 24 laptops. 36 were available by 2006, and 48 are projected for 2008 if funding holds.
- **Availability of librarians and services:** Six librarians provide instruction. These individuals are also needed for reference desk coverage, evening and weekend rotations, their own areas of responsibility, and tenure-track faculty requirements. For these reasons, we are physically unable to schedule more than two librarians to teach at the same time. In 2007, each librarian covered from 12 to 20 percent of 319 library instruction sessions. These percentages are roughly the equivalent of 42-70 sessions each per year. We have reached the point where we will need to sacrifice other areas to accommodate the instruction schedule, such as having an unattended reference desk.
- **Availability of space:** Prior to 2006, only one instruction room was available. Even with two rooms currently available, at peak times both of these are in constant use. Additionally, with the growth of the student body, the campus has had to expand to a new “East” campus across the highway. Sessions are not only requested in the library, but also at the new campus.
- **Faculty scheduling:** An online request system is available for faculty to fill out with their preferred dates and details. The system includes an option for checking availability on the online instruction calendar. The challenge with this system is to encourage the faculty to fill out the forms themselves and to check the calendar for available dates before submitting the request.
- **Assessment:** Without a credit course, we are dependent on faculty using their class time to administer in-depth library assessments.
- **Student reaction:** Students are attending multiple sessions for different classes, particularly first year students. This can result in motivation problems for students who feel that they’ve “already done this.”
- **Librarian burnout:** With high number of classes, there is the potential for burnout. This can occur when boredom exists due to heavy repetition of classes or when dealing with negative attitudes of frustrated students (Becker, p. 348-9).

The highly collaborative relationships among instruction librarians have made it possible to address many of these challenges. With all librarians carrying a heavy instruction load, we find it important to support each other as much as possible. Some of the measures we have taken to respond to the challenges listed above include:

- **Early scheduling:** We encourage faculty to make their requests for instruction as early as possible. This ensures that we have adequate resources (personnel and space) to accommodate them. We have been operating on a first-come, first-served basis in reserving the rooms, which is unfortunately necessary when more than two classes are requesting a specific date and time. This also saves us from making a judgment call on what classes are more deserving of instruction than others when there is too high a demand.
- **Shared calendar:** All scheduled classes are posted on a shared online calendar, so that everyone is aware of each other's workload. This calendar was developed in-house and is accessible to both librarians and faculty. Librarians advocate the use of the online calendar to faculty when they are choosing appropriate dates for instruction.
- **Laptop shortages:** When additional laptops are needed, the instruction program borrows laptops from circulation to supplement classes; this is more feasible at the beginning of semesters. We have successfully used instruction statistics to support requests for additional laptops from library and institutional funding sources.
- **Sharing the workload:** When preparing for similar classes, we share our ideas, notes, and materials with one another to help reduce preparation time for the class.
- **Hiring assistants:** Reference assistants provide support in reference desk coverage and help with other current projects, including preparations for library instruction classes. We have hired recent graduates or library school students and utilized senior interns.
- **Class visits:** In some instances, librarians are able to visit the classes instead of having the students come to the library. This reduces the demand on space, and is especially helpful with larger classes (45+). However, this works best if the class is focused only on online resources which can be demonstrated or accessed by student laptops, and does not need access to print or other tangible materials.
- **Classroom setup:** The classrooms are now continuously set up for library instruction classes, reducing preparation time.
- **Assessment:** We continuously look for opportunities to tie library assessment to course assessment. We are currently investigating a joint effort with the English Department to incorporate student use of citations in papers as part of their Core Curriculum assessment efforts.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

We still need to address areas which we believe will become issues in the near future. These include:

- **Core Curriculum changes:** Coastal Carolina University's revised Core Curriculum now includes information literacy goals embedded in a wider variety of classes. We expect an increase in requests for instruction for these courses.
- **Limits to Future Growth:** How much more instruction can be conducted given space, time and personnel constraints? Will we reach a point where we are completely booked, and unable to accommodate all requests?
- **Priority Classes:** Given the projected increase in course sections due to enrollment, will we need to begin setting class priorities based on course objectives? With the continued growth of FYE each year and the inclusion of the library on the syllabus will FYE gain priority over other courses? Will the first come first served philosophy continue to work?
- **Major Facility Changes:** We are planning for a new Information Commons and need to address library requirements for instructional space within larger university priorities. While we hope to at least maintain the instruction space that we have, other areas of the university such as learning assistance centers may be moving to the renovated space.
- **Faculty Requests for Instruction Space:** Faculty frequently request use of library instruction rooms for regular class meetings. This is due to the availability of our dependable laptops and the desire to be physically close to library resources. Due to instructional demand, we must reluctantly turn these requests down.
- **Online tutorials:** We realize that these can be effective learning tools, but internal research shows they must be required by the professor and graded in order for students to complete any or all of the modules.

CONCLUSION

We are considering every resource at hand to successfully maintain our information literacy program; it is one of the primary goals of the library. We are willing to develop more online instruction and tutorials. However, we do not want to give up our face to face contact, especially with our first year students. The in-person instruction is also important because it helps to create and maintain good relationships with faculty. In order to continue providing the instruction sessions, our program

resources need to grow at a similar rate as the enrollment at the University. There will always be challenges, but with a commitment to the campus community to provide a quality information literacy program, we look forward to addressing new issues before they arise.

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