

The Quarterly Interview: Doug Worsham

UCLA

-Edited Transcript-

LOEX: *Where do you work? What is your job title and main responsibilities? How long have you been in this position?*

Worsham: I'm currently the Team Lead for Teaching and Learning in the User Engagement division at UCLA Library. I have been at UCLA for about 6 years now and have had a few different job titles, all related to teaching and learning. I think of my role as fostering a shared and evolving vision for library instructional services. As a part of this, I try to encourage experimentation and the development of sustainably scaled approaches to information literacy and research skills instruction. Oh, and I'm also the library liaison for Psychology and Food Studies.

How have your previous experiences and employment informed the way you approach info lit instruction?

In some ways, librarianship is my third career in higher education. I started out as an English as a Second Language teacher, and so my teaching practice and philosophy of learning are deeply grounded in classroom experiences working with students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. My focus on active learning, as well as my application of constructivist and critical pedagogy all stem from the ESL classroom. These early teaching experiences are still foundational to the teaching I do today where I strive to prioritize learner voices and facilitate meaningful and transformative learning.

As a language teacher, I experimented quite a bit with instructional media and learning technologies, which led to my second career in higher education as a learning technology consultant. It was in this role that I explored and experimented with instructional design, media production, web development, and online and hybrid learning. I also gained crucial experience with faculty consultations, campus community building, and the design, development, and evaluation of large scale instructional services. This background has definitely informed my current work, where we strive to engage with diverse groups of students, instructors, advisors, residential life staff, and other campus partners to take a team-based approach to service design.

You are involved with an interesting project called WI+RE. Could you describe it?

Of course! WI+RE stands for Writing Instruction + Research Education and it has two essential elements. The first is WI+RE's Creative Team, a cohort of undergradu-

ate and graduate students trained in student-centered pedagogy, learning design, educational media production, and web design. The second essential part is the WI+RE Community, a growing group of library staff and campus partners. The Creative Team and the Community have collaborated to develop all kinds of instructional materials including videos, online workshops, animations, handouts, and social media communications. It is a really amazing partnership!

How did WI+RE develop? What has been its effect on students and instructors who have used it?

While I initially developed the concept, training, and design process for WI+RE, it has been substantively shaped by each cohort of WI+RE students. One of the many things that is wonderful about WI+RE is that the student designers are continually developing new ways to learn new skills and make things together. It is super inspiring to get to be a part of their creative process!

In terms of impact, WI+RE's activities are embedded in the campus course management system for a number of classes, most recently as a part of UCLA's General Education Cluster program. WI+RE also recently redesigned a series of online research skills workshops, allowing the library to offer many of our workshops both face to face and online. Feedback from students and instructors continues to be very positive and I think that everyone really likes that the activities are made by learners and for learners!

And of course, everything is open source and creative commons licensed—so we love it when other institutions use and adapt the materials WI+RE has made!

The WI+RE Team is composed of a large number of students who are designing and creating tutorials and other instructional materials. How has employment with WI+RE affected how they see themselves as researchers and writers?

That's a great question! I think the best thing to do would be to ask them. Here's what they had to say:

"WI+RE helped me identify as a researcher, and better myself as a writer, because our process allows for us to learn as we go. The communal and collaborative environment that WI+RE fosters makes me feel as if I am always learning alongside my peers, and not on my own. I'm a more confident learner, surely, and I'd also say I'm a

(Interview...Continued from page 12)

more curious writer now, too. Above all else, though, I feel like I'm a researcher, writer, and learner that's part of a larger, supportive community. For that, I'm infinitely grateful." TH, undergraduate student majoring in English and Creative Writing.

"Before WI+RE, I saw myself as a writer who was capable of writing in only a few modalities. I was confident that I could write a good literary character analysis or philosophy paper, but writing a scientific article was outside my reach. Working for WI+RE enabled me to identify and apply disciplinary writing conventions, such as those found in a scientific article, and thereby expanded the breadth of my writing capabilities. I now see myself as a much more versatile writer. I also see myself as someone who is capable of doing research with confidence." KR, undergraduate student majoring in Philosophy and Music Composition.

WI+RE students also reported an impact on how they see themselves as learners, designers, and teachers:

"In my time so far at WI+RE I've thought more closely about all of the work that should be going into successful instructional design by aiming to address the needs of all of the greatly varied groups of learners interested in research and writing. I've learned to break down the process of effective learning by examining my own learning successes and those of my colleagues to help inform our future work. This has not only informed how I approach my role as a learner and designer, but also as an instructor. I definitely approach instruction in a more careful and nuanced way, by taking the time to ensure that the learning outcomes I articulate at the start of a course planning process continue to match the assignments, evaluations, lecture and discussion style, and other course components in order to create the most effective learning experiences for students." JP, Ph.D. graduate student in Information Studies.

In your experience, what are effective strategies to engage campus collaborators in a shared mission?

I think it is essential to get outside of the library, both physically and mentally, to effectively collaborate with our campus partners. It is important to deeply listen, to truly give, and to be genuinely willing to change when we're seeking to build community. I think this sometimes (perhaps often) means changing and adapting our service offerings as the needs of our diverse users and campus partners evolve.

For WI+RE, this has meant creating a variety of ways for our partners and collaborators (both inside and outside of

the library) to engage with the creative process. Just in the past few months we have hosted open jam sessions, attended department meetings for rapid feedback on prototypes, sought out insights via email and online polls, and conducted in person "think aloud" user feedback sessions with students. We also try to engage with our community at every stage of the design process. Most recently we have been exploring how to celebrate the diverse community that makes WI+RE possible.

So maybe all of this comes down to something like listening, learning, changing, creating, and celebrating together? That's a start at least!

You led a workshop with Dani Brecher Cook from the University of California, Riverside titled "Let's Build Something!: A Rapid-Prototyping Instructional Design Workshop." Can you reiterate here the mini-manifesto articulated for this workshop?

I've become a big fan of manifestos. I think they are really useful for teams to articulate how their values inform their practice. The best manifestos provide both vision and direction, which can really help teams figure out how to move forward when facing difficult challenges.

When Dani and I got started working on our "Let's Build Something" workshop, we both knew we wanted to help people overcome the challenges everyone faces with creative work. As the ideas came together, we started talking about a "mini-manifesto" to help teams work together on creative projects. Thanks to Dani, the manifesto is very clear and concise, with just five lines:

- Build imperfect solutions quickly and on purpose.
- Adopt a culture of Yes! (or at least, Why not?).
- Work with what you have.
- Do less to make more.
- Move from "constructive criticism" to collaborative co-construction

What advice would you give to a new instruction librarian?

Maybe make a learning manifesto? ;-)

In addition to that, I would say that it is really important to always focus on learning as the foundation and purpose of teaching. For example, if you're asked for a "teaching philosophy" consider working on a "learning philosophy" first!

(Interview...Continued on page 6)

(Freewriting Activity...Continued from page 5)

gender expectations influence behavior at a gym. The activity tends to generate a lot of writing from students but I can feel confident their time is well-spent as I know it is grounded in sound research on learning practices. This activity helps students engage in reflection and gently coaxes them toward complex thinking strategies to better understand their topics through a variety of perspectives, all of which are important in helping students to have a more complete understanding of the research process.

References

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(Interview...Continued from page 11)

I also think that we are at a point where we need to develop both as strong classroom teachers, and as skilled designers of instructional programs. It would be really fun to work on learning opportunities for library professionals that foster these as interrelated skills.

What books or articles have influenced you?

- *How to be an explorer of the world: Portable life museum*. Smith, K. (2011).
 - ⇒ A really fun, interesting, and interactive book that has made me rethink the roles of note-taking, experimentation, and reflection in research and writing.
- *Where good ideas come from: The natural history of innovation*. Johnson, S. (2010).
 - ⇒ My favorite thing about this book is how it reframes creativity as an environmental factor rather than an innate quality. It is fun to think about the many ways we can reshape our environments to foster more creativity, experimentation, and joy.
- Senge, P. M. (1990). *The Leader's New Work: Building Learning Organizations*. Retrieved from <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/the-leaders-new-work-building-learning-organizations/>.

⇒ This article argues that for learning organizations the most important roles for leaders are as teachers, designers, and stewards. I think this means rethinking many of our traditional approaches to leadership and management and that there are key implications for how we bring more diverse perspectives and skill sets into library leadership positions.

Resources mentioned in the interview:

- See <https://ucla.app.box.com/v/build-something-toolkit> for the mini-manifesto as well as examples of the learning design activities used by WI+RE and shared in the "Build Something Workshop"
- See <https://uclalibrary.github.io/research-tips/> for WI+RE's website of embeddable online activities and handouts for writing and research instruction. You can also find, copy, and adapt all of the open source code for the WI+RE website and activities at <http://github.com/UCLALibrary/research-tips>
- See <http://twitter.com/WIREbruin> and <http://facebook.com/WIREbruin/> to keep up with WI+RE on social media.