

LOEX 2017 Conference Report: Lexington, KY

Heather Beirne and Clay Howard, Eastern Kentucky University

The 45th annual LOEX conference was held May 11-13, 2017 in the horse capital of the world—among the rolling countryside of Lexington, KY. The conference theme was based on the important principle of *Growing Stronger Together: Diversity and Community in Information Literacy* and the wide-array of sessions reflected that. A full-house (so many, we needed to use a small part of the convention center attached to the hotel) of 375 librarians were in attendance to interact and engage with the presenters and each other. After prelim activities on Thursday, including a tour of a local distillery and a timely pre-conference on coping with burnout, attendees enjoyed a Friday morning plenary session and then two days filled with 68 breakout sessions and 10 student poster sessions. Some highlights:

From Appalachia to Academia: Turning Obstacles into Opportunities

LOEX's 2017 plenary speaker, Dr. Aaron Thompson, kicked off the conference with his presentation entitled *From Appalachia to Academia: Turning Obstacles into Opportunities*. Dr. Thompson, who recently finished a year-long appointment as the Interim President of Kentucky State University, is now serving as Executive VP of the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education.

Drawing upon his experience as a Professor of Sociology in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Eastern Kentucky University, Dr. Thompson's presentation examined and interpreted the research on student success (which is increasingly being tied to state funding for public institutions of higher education), particularly for underrepresented students.

According to Dr. Thompson, research shows that diversity on college campuses strengthens development of learning and thinking skills, increases the power of a liberal arts education, and enhances career preparation and success for all students, yet we in higher education often don't intentionally and pervasively incorporate inclusivity and cultural competency practices into all that we do, particularly in terms of our curriculum and pedagogy.

He began the presentation by challenging conference attendees to examine and acknowledge our own biases and assumptions by considering his own life story. First, he asked attendees to call out their impressions of him. Then, Dr. Thompson engaged the audience in a discussion about what factors led them to form those beliefs. For example, many audience members thought him to be from the north because of his accent and his level of education.

Dr. Thompson, an African-American, was actually born in rural, Appalachian Clay County, Kentucky and grew up with 8 siblings in a one-room house. He made the point that most audiences do not believe he is from Kentucky, the south or Appalachia because he doesn't fit many of the stereotypes associated with those identities, and because he is a highly educated black man. In telling his story, Thompson illustrated that even educated people bring unconscious biases to our practice, leading us to, at best, miss opportunities to contribute to student success by engaging in equitable, culturally responsive practices and, at worst, do a significant disservice to underserved students who may already be struggling.

So what is student success and how to we measure it? According to Dr. Thompson, student success comes in two forms: quantitative (measured by things like graduation and retention rates) and qualitative (student learning itself), and we need to do a better job of assessing both. In particular and with respect to underrepresented students, Thompson argued that we can't accurately measure student success outcomes unless we examine the quality of the inputs we are providing, such as an accurate measure of students' disparate pre-higher ed baselines.

Dr. Thompson detailed some of the research-based, high impact, culturally competent practices that educators should intentionally undertake with all students in order to boost student achievement. First, Thompson charged us to work on constantly impressing upon students—particularly those that are disenfranchised—the importance of a college experience, a college degree or certificate, and a commitment to lifelong learning. College is worth it, but not just because people with a college degree have a better chance of getting a stable, high-paying job but because of the meaning it brings to people's lives, including advanced intellectual skills (including critical thinking, openness to new ideas, and more advanced levels of moral reasoning); better physical, social, and emotional health; effective citizenship; and autonomy, versatility, and mobility.

According to Dr. Thompson, research on human learning and student development indicates several key principles of college success: self-assessment or self-monitoring, active involvement, and interpersonal interaction (including student-faculty, student-advisor, student-mentor, and student-student interaction). Studies repeatedly show that college success is heavily influenced by the quality and quantity of student-faculty interaction inside and outside the classroom, e.g., incorporating content related to students' experiences and giving timely and formative feedback. Such contact is

positively associated with improved academic performance and increased critical thinking skills.

Finally, as America moves toward an increasingly diverse future, Thompson emphasized the importance of a faculty and staff appreciation for diversity on college campuses, and reiterated the importance of intentionally drawing upon diversity as a learning experience and resource for our students. Diversity, he said, strengthens the power of a liberal arts education; there is no way to truly gain a global perspective without understanding human diversity. As students experience diversity in higher education, they become aware of perceptual “blind spots” (like the ones Dr. Thompson drew attention to at the beginning of his presentation), and more able to avoid the dangers of groupthink.

Above all, awareness of diversity and self-monitoring of cultural competency is essential for anyone who works with college students. As he ended his talk, Dr. Thompson challenged every conference attendee to walk away from LOEX with an action plan about how to achieve this on our own campuses and in our own work.

Breakout Sessions

It is more important than ever for library instructional programs to be properly structured and sequenced. Recognizing this, presenters Stefanie Metko, Julia Feerar and Amanda MacDonald from Virginia Tech’s session “**Optimizing the Field Through a Curriculum Mapping Initiative: Adapting the Framework for Assessing Information Literacy Programs**” described a curriculum mapping initiative undertaken to provide a clear overview of the reach and effectiveness of a library instruction program.

Curriculum mapping is a method for aligning instruction with desired goals and program outcomes (Univ. of Hawaii at Manoa, 2013, <https://manoa.hawaii.edu/assessment/howto/mapping.htm>). Here, the desired goals were mandated by a new University-wide initiative (the “VT-shaped student”, <http://undergraduate.provost.vt.edu/vt-shaped-student.html>) that focuses on transdisciplinary knowledge and technological literacy.

The group piloted the mapping project in one academic department (English), chosen for its strong relationship with the library, particularly among First Year Writing courses. First, the group created a Program Overview Template (using the familiar Google Sheets), which lists all the department courses with details such as the current and aspirational level of library engagement. The presenters also explored software options for data visualization, and ultimately chose Tableau (<https://www.tableau.com>) due to its high level of functionality.

Next, they crafted Outcome Areas derived from the ACRL Framework and mapped to the VT General Education Indicators. For each Outcome Area (Reflective Discovery, Critical Evaluation, Ethics, Creation and Scholar-

ship) an Information Literacy Template was created. Each outcome was then mapped to what, where, and how it was being taught, , i.e., whether the outcome was introduced, reinforced, or mastered.

All of this data was used to create a color-coded map that illustrated the information literacy connections for each course in the department (e.g., blue indicated a course with a research project, gold indicated a course for which the library had done instruction). Presenters advised those interested in curriculum mapping their own instruction programs to start with the questions, What do you want to map? and What do you want to know?

In this session, “**Adopting a Common Language: Using the Framework to Market Your Information Literacy Program to Faculty**,” librarians Sarah Steele, Elizabeth Dobbins, Brooke Taxakis, and Steve Bahanaman described the comprehensive approach they took to marketing their library’s instruction program to faculty at Campbell University. Inspired by a fortuitously-timed 2016 workshop hosted by the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) on information fluency in the disciplines, Campbell University librarians developed a new marketing strategy and set of website-based marketing tools that have helped them collaborate more deeply with faculty.

First, the library revised, based on the Framework, their Information Fluency plan to outline their instructional goals and initiatives. Around it, they developed a revised, faculty-centered website (<http://www.lib.campbell.edu/information-fluency>), where the Frames are used as a guide toward the common goal of information fluency. The librarians abbreviated each frame into its most essential components and into plain language. When faculty click through each frame, they find a “key sentence” descriptor of it, followed by that frame’s knowledge practices and tangible examples of how that frame is taught in disciplinary / course context, so that faculty get both an abstract and a concrete look at the Framework. Many of these are things that librarians have been teaching for years, but the website and strategic marketing plan provided a way for them to contextualize it for their faculty.

The page also provides a “Craft an Effective Research Assignment” section which presents the six frames as elements to emphasize in assignment design and rubric creation, and which gives practical ideas and suggestions for strategically incorporating them into assignments.

Finally, the website advertises several library-faculty outreach events, such as faculty research lightning talks, the student Academic Symposium and the faculty-librarian breakfast, which are important part of the Library’s marketing plan.

The presentation wrapped up with an example of a recent successful faculty-librarian partnership, in which librar-

(LOEX 2017 Report...continued from page 3)

ians engaged in student consultations, sent encouraging emails with research tips to English students throughout their research process, and assessed all student research papers and research logs.

In her presentation, “**A Strong Start Out of the Gate! Building Student Engagement Before Class Begins**”, Lindy Scripps-Hoekstra (Grand Valley State University) challenged attendees to take advantage of the precious, often wasted minutes before the beginning of a library instruction session, as students are trickling in. She provided many practical examples of how we can bring the K-12 concept of “bell work” into our practice as academic library instructors. Such strategies can provide a pedagogically meaningful foundation for the rest of the session, as they can help activate prior student knowledge, facilitate self-assessment, build rapport, avoid transitional hang-ups as classes get settled, deter disruptive behavior by setting a tone early on, and expands librarian instructional time.

For example, in the few minutes before the session began, LOEX participants were asked by Scripps-Hoekstra to complete a short prompt: write exactly 16 words (no more, no less) explaining the gist of the value of activating prior knowledge. Requiring it to be done using a specific number of words adds elements of creativity, interest, metacognition, and competition to the task. In a short time before class has even begun, our prior knowledge was activated, we were given a sense of what we knew about a topic that would be part of the presentation, and we were engaged.

According to Scripps-Hoekstra, who previously taught high school history, there are three types of pre-class engagement strategies: activating prior knowledge, facilitating self-assessment (metacognition), and building rapport (establishing connections that will pay off later in the session). Example of activities in these areas include playing short YouTube clips on a loop as students enter in order to lay the groundwork for learning by analogy (e.g., how are dating sites such as eHarmony and FarmersOnly comparable to general vs. specific library databases?), the “gist” assessment activity mentioned earlier, and being sure to greet—with eye contact—students as they enter the room.

Despite consistent dissatisfaction with the model of the one-shot, many libraries only shift decidedly away from it when compelled by external forces. On Friday afternoon, presenters Amanda Peach and Angel Rivera (Berea College) described a successful transition from an obligatory one-shot instruction session to a voluntary, skills-based workshop model for first year students in “**You Don’t Have to Cover Everything: Replacing the One-Shot with Competency-Based Library Instruction.**” When the “mini-research” assignment in the College’s freshman composition course was dropped to focus on alternative assignments such as timed writing prompts, librarians saw this curricu-

lum change as an opportunity to pilot a new approach. Though the writing assignment had changed, library instruction was still needed, as the results of a survey (HEDS Research Practices Survey, <https://www.hedsconsortium.org/heds-research-practices-survey/>) filled out by a large majority of incoming freshmen indicated that students still lacked in basic information literary skills.

To address this skills gap, librarians needed to make students aware of the areas in which they were deficient and motivated to address it, while still keeping the instruction interventions voluntary. After some experimentation (e.g., relying on faculty to determine how, if at all, to have their students participate), the librarians decided on a more direct, structured method—having instructors simply distribute to each student a personalized invitation to attend workshops based on their survey performance in the three areas: finding; evaluating; using sources. These active-learning workshops were offered in the evenings and on weekends (that timing got the best attendance) and were short—30 minutes in total—with time at the end for students to retake the corresponding area of the HEDS survey. Springshare’s LibCal (<https://www.springshare.com/libcal/>) was used for calendaring and student self-booking.

While scalability is a concern going forward (e.g., in year two of the project, three librarians led 185 workshops over 12 weeks) survey results showed a dramatic improvement in student skill levels across the three areas strengths and compensate for their weaknesses. Metacognition takes them from being cognitively passive to being cognitively active.

If there is mounting evidence that shows students learn more in a flipped classroom mode, then why haven’t more libraries left the standard one-shot behind? The session “**Leading by Letting Go: Shifting Strategies for First Year Library Instruction and the Creation of an ‘Instructor’s Toolkit’**” by Laura Birkenhauer and Lindsay Miller from Miami University described their sticking points to making that transition and demonstrated how they were able to move toward a more sustainable model and take back some control by letting go.

The presenters began by telling a relatable story: stuck in a rut doing one-shots, stretching themselves too thin just to keep their instruction numbers up, and never stopping to ask, “Why are we doing this?” Confronted with a dramatic decrease in librarians, they saw an opportunity to get past their sticking point. They decided to take a flipped classroom approach in their instruction for First Year Writing (FYW).

First, they created pre-session materials consisting of a library basics LibGuide and LMS (Canvas) modules that students could earn badges for completing. Next, they offered pre-scheduled library sessions for up to three FYW

(LOEX 2017 Report...continued from page 13)

classes at a time while also putting a limit on the number of sessions per day and time slot that librarians would teach (scheduled via SignUpGenius: <http://www.signupgenius.com>); if a FYW faculty’s classes are unable to attend, faculty can teach on their own utilizing a librarian-created “Instructor’s Toolkit” with lesson plans and activities from which the faculty can choose. Additionally, to make the session preparation less stressful for all public services librarians, they created unified active learning lesson plans.

One of the most thought provoking and inspiring parts of the presentation was a think-pair-share reflective exercise in which the audience was asked to consider how we could solve our sticking points. Attendees were encouraged to consider how they could lead by letting go by considering

not only the worst that could happen, but also the best that could happen.

 For more information about the conference, and the PowerPoints and handouts for many of the sessions, including from all the sessions listed in this article, visit the website at <http://www.loexconference.org/2017/sessions.html>

(Research as a Résumé Builder...continued from page 6)

APPENDIX B

Criteria	Performance indicator	Proficient	Emerging	Little or No Evidence
Understanding of information ethics	Ability to recognize ethical choices in the use of information academically and professionally	Student demonstrates good judgment and reasoning when making ethical choices.	Student sometimes demonstrates good judgement when making ethical choices. Reasoning about ethical choices may be lacking.	No understanding of ethical choices.
Search strategies	Ability to match research needs to information sources. Search strategies and terminologies are refined as needed.	All relevant source types are identified and understanding of the uses, advantages, etc. of source types is demonstrated. Effective search strategies are identified. Strategies and terminologies are refined as needed.	Some relevant source types are identified and understanding of the uses, advantages, etc. of source types identified. Search strategies may be limited and may not be refined as needed.	Relevant source types are not identified and little understanding is shown of the uses, advantages, etc. of source types. Search strategies are ineffective.
Use of information tools	Effectiveness at using databases, search engines, and demographic and psychographic tools	All information needed is located. Effective use of information tools is demonstrated.	Some information needed is located. Use of information tools is sometimes effective.	Information is frequently not located. No evidence of effective use of information tools.
Application of information	Ability to choose information that is authoritative and relevant. Multiple perspectives are sought and synthesized.	All sources are appropriate, current, and credible. Information used is specifically relevant. Possible limitations or bias of sources are acknowledged and analyzed. Multiple sources are found and synthesized to establish perspective.	Most sources are appropriate, current, and credible. Information used is somewhat relevant. Possible limitations or bias are sometimes acknowledged. Multiple sources are sometimes found but may not be synthesized.	Poor choice of sources. Information provided is limited, superficial, unreliable and/or irrelevant. Possible limitations or bias are unrecognized.