Personal Narrative

Introduction

As English Research & Instruction Librarian, I have a variety of duties. Primarily, I serve as the library liaison to the English, American Studies, and African American & Diaspora Studies departments. Like most library faculty members, I have a 12-month appointment, and the bulk of my job description (80%) is devoted to supporting the educational process of the University of Wyoming, which as stated in the description includes “respond[ing] to research and informational inquiries at the reference desk [emphasis mine], by telephone, e-mail and mail. Serves as liaison to English, which includes subject bibliographer, specialized reference and library instruction activities. Participate in special projects as required.” I would argue that as technologies and movements within higher education propel library services and librarian activity in new directions, that description necessarily must transform to accommodate current and future academic research behaviors and activities.

Behind contributing to the educational process, scholarship and service are a smaller, but still important part of my job at 10% each. As I am a member of the Research & Instruction department, it is likely unsurprising that my research and service activities largely center on educational, technological, and instructional topics.

Practice of Librarianship

As library user behavior adapts to the affordances created by technology and connectivity, the importance of the traditional reference desk has diminished, or at least significantly changed. Since I came to UW, we have implemented both instant message and text message reference service, which is the only mode of reference service that has increasing demand. This phenomenon suggests that new models of service should be explored, and I am very interested in doing so. My own practice of librarianship is increasingly mobile; you are more likely to find me in a classroom, at a student computer terminal, or in meetings across campus than in my office—at least during peak business hours. I believe that visibility and presence outside the library walls are important ways I can connect to my liaison areas and to the broad instructional goals of the university. It is also the best way I know to talk to students.

Liaison work

As a liaison, I provide library instruction sessions for English classes at all levels, tailored to the individual course objectives and assignments and provide similar instruction to my other departments as needed. I select library materials to support teaching, learning, and research in my assigned subject areas and solicit input from discipline faculty to guide this selection. Recently, I met with the new library liaison in African American & Diaspora Studies to describe collections and services. The department has a small, internal library, and I plan to determine if they have titles we should duplicate in the Libraries’ collections to make them available for circulation. This is an example of the kind of collaboration I hope to continue to build with my liaison departments.

As their liaison, I have had opportunities to work closely with English department faculty and students on projects. The composition program has included me in conversations about curriculum and assignments, and I have participated in the training they provide to the graduate teaching assistants who teach first-year composition. Working with graduate assistants has also helped me more effectively support their masters-level research. Because I have a built-in way to
meet almost all of the graduate students, it is easy to build relationships with them that translate into individual consultations for their thesis research. In recent years, several M.A. students have expressed interest in librarianship as a career, and I welcome the opportunity to support them in exploring their options. Currently, I am working with an American Studies graduate student to design some unofficial internship activities for spring semester, so she can explore collection development, reference, and instruction activities in preparation for applying to library school. Mentoring students is a big part of faculty work in other disciplinary areas, and I believe librarians should actively participate in this.

This summer, Caroline McCracken-Flesher, the incoming department chair for English, organized an international literature conference on campus. This provided me an excellent opportunity to work with her on a related exhibit in Coe Library. Along with several other library staff members and Maggie Farrell, I helped with some of the organization of the conference and related activities including the public keynote address by Diana Gabaldon. I greatly value my relationships within the English Department and am fortunate to work with them.

Instruction
Teaching is my primary focus as an academic librarian and I view all the other work I do as an extension of instruction. Much of that teaching takes place in instruction sessions, the research desk and during individual and small-group consultation. While English courses make up a large percentage of my library instruction, I am an active participant in the broader instruction my department provides for general education courses, first-year courses, and subject areas with liaisons who work in other functional areas of the Libraries.

Additionally, I have taught the 1-credit online L-course developed by the librarians, LBRY 3010. When teaching in any setting, I'm always looking for ways to connect the tasks students need to learn with the learning goals for the assignment or course, as well as broader critical thinking and information literacy skills. This is a constant challenge, but one I welcome and enjoy. During the summer of 2010, Melissa Bowles-Terry and I designed our own version of LBRY 3010 with support from the Ellbogen Center for Teaching and Learning’s course redesign grant and related workshops. Melissa and I shared the goals of connecting information literacy concepts to students’ academic and personal research agendas, aligning course outcomes with higher-level conceptual models rather than tools-based skills, and integrating the TIP tutorial and quiz deeply into the course units.

In addition to my primary duties, I served as Interim Outreach Librarian from August 2006-September 2007. This involved working with the Outreach School to provide library instruction and support for Outreach Credit Programs. Outreach instruction is offered in a variety of formats: audio conferencing, compressed video, through the online course shell, and visits to regional centers. All of these duties require frequent and clear communication with departments outside the Libraries, including community college librarians and UW staff at Outreach Regional Centers around the state. Even after the Outreach position—now called Distance Learning Librarian—was filled, I continued to view the off-campus population as a priority. The entire Research & Instruction department serves these students, staff, and faculty through the research desk, and we have worked to provide service equivalent to those offered to on-campus affiliates. Offering library instruction to distance courses in my subject areas is a priority for me, and I have begun embedding in online sections of a senior-level professional writing course and attempting to maintain closer contact with faculty in my liaison areas who teach distance courses.
Professional Development

Continuing education and professional development like the course redesign project are high priorities for me. It is important for me to keep learning and reflecting on my work as a teacher. My research interests are also closely related to instruction, and include assessment (both of teaching and learning), classroom and social networking technologies, and library marketing, as well as collaboration between librarians and disciplinary faculty.

I continue to look for opportunities to learn more about teaching and learning both in the context of library instruction, but also in disciplinary and university-wide contexts. One of my strong interests is first-year learning, and I have been actively participating in the discussion series offered by LeaRN, which complements my own research in the area. Another rich area of professional development is articulation. I have had the opportunity to participate in the statewide conversations about reading and writing instruction in all levels of school, through the Wyoming School-University Partnership. My participation has given me a broader understanding of the ways students are taught to read and write, what kinds of testing and other assessments they experience during the K-12 years, and how learning goals at all levels do and don’t align with our university learning goals.

Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity

With Rick Fisher, I have been conducting a survey research project focusing on the reading habits, attitudes, and experiences of first-year college students. We collected data for three years and have completed analysis of the entire data set. This year we will also begin surveying students with senior standing, in an attempt to see what kinds of changes occur during college. We have presented some of our findings at national conferences and have used what we’ve learned to influence the curriculum of the first-year composition course here at UW. We were invited by the editor of a composition journal to submit an article focusing on both the research findings and their teaching implications, which we did in September of this year. It is currently under editorial review.

The other major track my scholarship has taken is embedded librarianship. Because I believe that information literacy must be infused into the disciplines for it to be meaningful to students, I have focused more energy on working with curricula and within the teaching support structures of the university than on attempting to increase the number of one-time library workshops I offer. My work in that area includes activities like participating in the creation of the reader textbook for first-year composition, offering workshops through the teaching and learning center, and consulting with faculty on building information literacy concepts into assignments. All of this has led to a series of publications and presentations on embedded librarian work, most notably the book I co-edited with Cass Kvenild published in May 2011. Our publisher has approved a second book, this time offering project examples and frameworks librarians can adapt and use for their own embedded projects.

Professional Service and University-related Activities

My professional and university service activities align with my research and practical interests. I have focused my national service in the Association of College & Research Libraries, where I have worked on the past two national conferences; I am co-chairing a conference committee for the 2013 meeting. I believe this work is important because it facilitates the continuing education and the research agendas of the membership and gives me the opportunity to work with
librarians at all stages of their careers. It is particularly fulfilling to help first-time presenters connect to the organization. My service activities at the university center on teaching and technology, particularly on bringing the two together. My involvement with the eLearn interest group and the workshops I’ve given at the Teaching Writing in Wyoming meetings both allow me to share with other teachers practical strategies for using technologies effectively. I believe that teaching and supporting other teachers are the reasons I work at the university, and plan to continue looking for service opportunities in this area.

Kaijsa J. Calkins 23 August 2011