

## **Instructor-Librarians, Mentor-Librarians, & the Beauty of Being Extracurricular**

Over the last thirty years, there has been increasing emphasis on the teaching role that academic librarians can, or should, play in undergraduate education. The impetus for this is coming from two main sources: (1) evolving ideas within the library profession and (2) “reforms” within higher education throughout the United States. I see this as a slow paradigm shift that is still very much in progress. Instructional technique and theory are still very marginal subjects in the academic librarian tracks of MLIS programs, so most college librarians with instructional duties have been training on the job or through independent study.<sup>1</sup> (You might say that they are making this up as they go!) And while many academic librarians are developing excellent ways to contribute to instruction and develop curricula, they may be overlooking some of the potential strengths of the library as an extracurricular institution and how this status could put librarians in a unique position to help satisfy the ever-present need for out-of-class, individualized support for students. Library-based mentoring programs could be a very effective and rewarding way for **some** librarians to contribute more directly to students’ intellectual development and academic success, and the mentor role could be seen as more in line with a library’s mission than the librarian-instructor role.

### **Impetus for Change**

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<sup>1</sup> **Scott Walter**, “Librarians as Teachers: A Qualitative Inquiry Into Professional Identity,” *College and Research Libraries* 69, no. 1 (January 2008), <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/publications/crljournal/2008/jan/Walter08.pdf> (accessed November 13, 2008).

Within the library profession, there has been an evolution from the “library instruction movement” of the 1970s to the “information literacy” movement that began in the 1980s and continues today. The principles of information literacy were first given official expression in documents such as the 1989 final report of the ALA’s Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, which urged commissions of higher education to incorporate information literacy into curricular requirements. This and later assertions of information literacy advocates indicate that a significant and vocal segment of the library profession is strongly in support of giving librarians greater responsibility within the college curriculum.<sup>2</sup> Changes have also been occurring within U.S. higher education as a whole, and an increased focus on the contributions of all campus programs to specific learning outcomes is contributing to “expanding responsibility for direct instruction on campus by student affairs educators, librarians, and other academic professionals drawn from outside the ranks of the traditional teaching faculty.”<sup>3</sup> A key manifestation of this larger change includes the passing of Title IV of the 1998 Higher Education Amendments. Due to this act of Congress, institutions that receive federal support are now required to have in place assessment plans that will enable them to report how each of their activities contributes to student success, as indicated by concrete outcomes **such**

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<sup>2</sup> American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy, “Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report” (American Library Association/Association of College and Research Libraries, January 10, 1989.) <http://staging.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/acrlpubs/whitepapers/presidential.cfm> (accessed November 12, 2008); Gary B. Thompson, "Information Literacy Accreditation Mandates: What They Mean for Faculty and Librarians," *Library Trends* 51, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 220-223. Professional Development Collection, <http://micro189.lib3.hawaii.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tfh&AN=9031050&site=ehost-live> (accessed November 14, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Walter, 65.

as content mastery, skill acquisition, and course completion.<sup>4</sup> In the wake of this federal action, U.S. regional accreditation standards underwent substantial revisions in the late 1990s, and this resulted in an increased emphasis on the teaching role of academic libraries, as well as a decrease in specific requirements regarding the size of library collections, staff, or budgets.<sup>5</sup> These developments are part of an even larger, ongoing national trend that emphasizes the need for solid evidence that our colleges and universities substantially contribute to “meaningful student learning outcomes.”<sup>6</sup>

I know from experience that these federal and regional requirements and trends are directly affecting college libraries; the community college library that I work for has found that its proposals and reports to the campus administration are being criticized or rejected because they do not show how our activities directly contribute to outcomes such as student retention, persistence, and graduation or transfer. As an LIS student, I think I have a lot to learn from the situation in my library. Through it, I am understanding how important it is for academic librarians to create ways of making more of a difference in students’ development, and to demonstrate their unique contributions to learning.

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<sup>4</sup> *Amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965*, Public Law 105-244, 105<sup>th</sup> Cong., 2<sup>nd</sup> sess. (January 27, 1998). <http://www.ed.gov/policy/highered/leg/hea98/index.html> (accessed November 11, 2008); Bonnie Gratch-Lindauer, "Comparing the Regional Accreditation Standards: Outcomes Assessment and Other Trends," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 28, no. 1/2 (January 2002): 14, Professional Development Collection, <http://micro189.lib3.hawaii.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tfh&AN=6174798&site=ehost-live> (accessed November 14, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Gary B. Thompson, "Information Literacy Accreditation Mandates: What They Mean for Faculty and Librarians." *Library Trends* 51, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 220. Professional Development Collection, <http://micro189.lib3.hawaii.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=tfh&AN=9031050&site=ehost-live> (accessed November 14, 2008); Gratch-Lindauer, 16.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Education, *U.S. Department of Education Awards \$2.45 Million for Improved Measures of Achievement for Post-Secondary Students*, press release (September 28, 2007). <http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2007/09/09282007.html> (accessed December 1, 2008); see also reports such as U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Student Outcomes Information for Policy-Making*, NCES 97-991, prepared by Patrick Terenzini for the Council of the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative Working Group on Student Outcomes from a Policy Perspective (Washington, DC, 1997). <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs97/97991.pdf> (accessed December 1, 2008).

College librarians have the opportunity and the challenge of defining interesting, effective new roles for themselves. But what are their best choices?

### **Instructor-Librarians: Contributing to the Curriculum**

In addition to updating their traditional in-class instruction sessions, some of the main ways that librarians are increasing their instructional role include: (1) helping curriculum committees create and implement student learning objectives (SLOs) for information literacy within a variety of disciplines, (2) creating on-line tutorials, (3) collaborating with teaching faculty to add information literacy content to courses, and (4) teaching their own for-credit information literacy courses or noncredit workshops. The LIS literature overflows with accounts and reflections of librarians involved in these activities, and I found two particularly inspiring sets of role models at Purdue University and York College of Pennsylvania. At Purdue, librarians worked with science instructors who wanted to improve student performance in research projects. These librarians first collaborated with the instructors to design “problem-based” assignments that would develop problem-definition, searching, and information-evaluation skills. Then, at strategic points in the semester, the librarians taught class sessions on the information and synthesis skills that students would need to succeed in these assignments, and they also helped assess student development of these skills. These efforts resulted in measurable improvement in the quality of the students’ papers and presentations and, importantly, they were “accepted by students as valuable experiences.”<sup>7</sup> I found this project inspiring because it showed how librarians can connect very directly and positively with students’

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<sup>7</sup>Michael Fosmire and Alexius Macklin, “Riding the Active Learning Wave: Problem-Based Learning as a Catalyst for Creating Faculty–Librarian Instructional Partnerships,” *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship* (Spring 2002), <http://www.istl.org/02-spring/article2.html> (accessed November 14, 2008).

discovery processes. I think similarly inspiring connections are being made at York College, where librarians now teach a two-credit, core-curriculum information literacy course. In a reflective essay written when this program was a little over two years old, one of the participating librarians described how the librarian–student relationship has been enriched on her campus, and she offered insight into the substantial role that librarians can play in students’ intellectual life: “Students depend on context and personal connections to help the research skills ‘stick.’ Librarian-teachers maneuver through the research process, pointing students toward connections and context. The key is to articulate a workable process—not to spout research steps, but to help students to adapt the process to fit their needs.” This librarian notes that this teaching activity has improved her library’s institutional position, moving it from a support role to “one more central to the college’s educational mission.” However, she asserts that all of the participating librarians agree that the program’s biggest rewards are the long-term relationships that they are forming with students. The repercussions of this are reaching back into the library itself, where, at the reference desk, the librarians’ traditional “mediator” role is being transformed by their “new role as mentors.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Mentor-Librarians and the Extracurricular Library**

While very few academic libraries have established formal student mentoring programs, the term “mentor” pops up frequently in the literature about librarians’ instructional roles, and I think this reflects an admirable general intention to play a more active and responsive part in students’ intellectual development. The term’s recurrence

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<sup>8</sup> Kimberley Donnelly, “Reflections on What Happens When Librarians Become Teachers,” *Computers in Libraries* 20, no. 3 (March 2000), <http://www.infoday.com/cilmag/mar00/donnelly.htm> (accessed November 5, 2008).

set me to thinking about how the library's unique position as a "place apart" from instructor-directed classrooms and labs could be presenting academic librarians with excellent opportunities to develop formal and informal mentor relationships with students. A college library, more than any other place on campus, represents higher education's aspiration that each student will develop his or her own methods of discovery, synthesis, and expression. Taking the individual nature of this process very seriously, it may be that what students need most from the library are mentors, as opposed to more instructors. By developing more of a mentor role, librarians could directly benefit many types of students, while at the same time honoring the value of their libraries as "extracurricular" entities—with functions that potentially reach far beyond the set structure of any department's curriculum.

Good mentoring programs have been proven to make a positive difference in college student success,<sup>9</sup> and undergraduate mentoring is consistently advocated in studies of higher education, including the influential Boyer Commission report, "Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities" (1998). This report also asserts that undergraduate education should be research- or inquiry-based, in order to stimulate "original thought and independent effort," and it invokes as a guiding slogan John Dewey's principle that "learning is based

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<sup>9</sup> The literature on this topic is extensive. A good source of pertinent articles is the *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, including Amaury Nora and Gloria Crisp, "Mentoring Students: Conceptualizing and Validating the Multi-Dimensions of a Support System," *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 9, no. 3 (2007–2008): 337–356, ERIC, <http://baywood.metapress.com.eres.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/link.asp?target=contribution&id=BP81016MX2T5T547> (accessed November 15, 2008); and Diane M. Sorrentino, "SEEK Mentoring Program: An Application of the Goal-Setting Theory," *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 8, no. 2 (2006–2007): 241–250, ERIC, <http://baywood.metapress.com.eres.library.manoa.hawaii.edu/link.asp?target=contribution&id=7D9TD30YN9T08DWL> (accessed November 16, 2008).

on discovery guided by mentoring rather than on the transmission of information.”<sup>10</sup>

Since a key part of an academic library’s mission is to promote discovery and original thought, it seems to me that skillful mentoring of these endeavors would be a natural extension of that mission. And, after scouring the LIS literature, I did find two sample programs that show that at least a few librarians have been successfully developing mentor roles.

The two programs focused on quite different student populations. The Gateway Library Research Mentoring Program at Pennsylvania State University was primarily geared toward freshmen, transfer students, international students, and adult learners re-entering the formal education system—that is, toward students who very often need the most assistance in adapting to academic life and accessing campus resources. Launched in 2000, it offered personalized guidance designed not only to help students use information resources more effectively but also to “enrich their overall academic experience.” Though it appears that the Gateway Library mentoring program has now been dropped, it was very popular with students, showed early success in increasing student confidence, and was cited as a “role model” in LIS sources up to 2003.<sup>11</sup> The librarian-mentor program at the University of Guelph, Ontario, was created in 2002 for a

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<sup>10</sup> Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University, “Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities,” 1998, <http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/> (accessed November 15, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Lesley Moyo and Ashley Robinson, “Beyond Research Guidance: The Gateway Library Research Mentoring Program,” *Library Management* 22, no. 8/9 (2001): 343–350. LISTA, <http://micro189.lib3.hawaii.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lxh&AN=ISTA3700422&site=ehost-live> (accessed November 16, 2008); David Byrne, “Mentoring - Enabling, Empowering, Inspiring,” *Update Magazine* (CILIP) (April 2003), <http://www.cilip.org.uk/publications/updatesmagazine/archive/archive2003/april/update0304c.htm> (accessed November 16, 2009); Lisa Allen, “The Information/Media Specialist in the Academic Learning Community: Integrating Kuhlthau into the Undergraduate Curriculum,” unpublished paper, Drexel University, December 3, 2002. <http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~la35/Kuhlthau.html> (accessed November 16, 2008).

very different group of students: undergraduates in a four-year interdisciplinary honors program, “many of which are very likely to be pursuing graduate degrees.” At Guelph, a formal mentor relationship is established between each freshman student and a librarian, with emphasis on general guidance and advising during this first year. By a student’s final semester, the focus changes to more intensive, one-on-one research mentoring as the student defines, researches, and writes a culminating paper. This program has received strongly positive responses from students, professors, and librarians. Students have particularly benefitted from consistent, personalized guidance through the more advanced scholarly processes. And the librarians’ comments indicate that this type of mentor role can be very satisfying; as one librarian stated, “It was a privilege to work with a student in a context where there was more sustained, intentional contact than what is possible at the reference desk.”<sup>12</sup> At both Guelph and Gateway, mentoring programs helped librarians move beyond the outmoded reference mediation model and develop roles that support students’ independent achievements in very responsive and effective ways. I think these examples demonstrate that librarians have at their disposal some unique, noninstructional ways to contribute to student success.

One of these programs based its concept of “mentor” on a fairly broad definition from the Oxford English Dictionary: “A person who acts as guide and adviser to another person, especially one who is younger and less experienced.”<sup>13</sup> And one of them relied on this more complex definition from the literature on management:

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<sup>12</sup> Justin Harrison and Lorna Rourke. "The Benefits of Buy-In: Integrating Information Literacy into Each Year of an Academic Program," *Reference Services Review* 34, no. 4 (November 2006): 604, LISTA, <http://micro189.lib3.hawaii.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lxh&AN=23845647&site=ehost-live> (accessed November 15, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Harrison and Rourke, 599.

a developmental, caring, and helping relationship where one person (mentor) invests time, know-how and effort in enhancing another person's (mentee's, protégé's) growth, knowledge and skills, and responds to critical needs in the life of that person in ways that prepare the individual for greater productivity or achievement in the future.<sup>14</sup>

To me, this second definition describes a type of relationship that I have seen make a real difference in undergraduate learning, in my work as a college English instructor and a faculty tutor at the Learning Center on my campus (Maui Community College). When funding permits, our Learning Center is able to provide faculty and APT tutors who can meet with individual students consistently—throughout a semester, a school year, or even over a period of years—to help these students develop skills in identified areas, most often in reading comprehension and writing. Now that I work in the campus library, I have been wondering if our under-used reference librarians could possibly provide much-needed, consistent, one-on-one support for students who are developing their skills in locating and reading scholarly literature, synthesizing findings, and writing academic papers. As an English instructor, I know that these are “critical needs,” and as a future librarian I would welcome the opportunity to invest “time, know-how and effort in enhancing growth, knowledge and skills” in the context of the library—where a student's individual growth and unique learning processes can be given more focused attention than is possible in a classroom. To begin implementing a research mentoring program, the librarians could follow the Learning Center's successful appointment series system. This system would give students the opportunity to sign up to meet with one of our librarians for at least four appointments during the course of one class project. Appointments should probably last 20 to 30 minutes, and I think the initial two meetings should occur within three to five days of each other—to help students get their projects

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<sup>14</sup> Moyo and Robinson, 343.

off to a strong start. Since many of our students live far from campus and have work and family responsibilities, appointments could be conducted over the phone or through email, chat, or IM, in addition to the in-person option. Like the Learning Center's faculty tutors, I think that librarian research mentors could make a measureable difference in student achievement. At a basic level, the effectiveness of a library mentor program might be partially assessed by tracking the assignment and course grades, persistence, graduation rates, and job placement patterns of students who use the program, and then comparing them to campus averages. For a more sophisticated understanding of such a program's effects, instruments would need to be developed to measure student mentees' acquisition of higher-level research, analysis, and writing skills. I would also hope that a program like this would help establish more firmly that it is part of an academic library's mission to point students toward the world of ideas that thrives beyond any course or institutional goals. I see a college library as a entity that supports but also exceeds the curriculum, where the focus is not only on satisfying course objectives and assignment requirements but also on fostering students' abilities to set their own objectives and engage in original, creative thought that reaches beyond a particular instructor's requirements. I believe that academic librarians could be in a unique position to effectively mentor students as they explore what their own particular intellectual missions might be and what their individual paths might require.

While academic librarians' instructional innovations and curricular contributions are both necessary and inspiring, I hope that their evolving roles manage to preserve and honor what I love most about libraries: their extracurricular nature. The Latin term *curriculum* ("course" or "track") derives from the word for "race" (*currere*). And if I

become an academic librarian, I do not think I could be happy if my work with students could never be **apart** from the race, off the prescribed track, veering off into the wilderness...if it could not be dedicated to discovery.

## **Appendix: Responses to Suggestions on Draft**

Re Comment 1 (page 1): From somewhere in my scanning of article titles, I did get the impression that the term “teacher-librarian” had a specific use—but I forgot about this in my haste to come up with a paper title! I changed this confusing term.

Re Comment 2 (page 3): I am a little overwhelmed by the literature on student learning outcomes right now, so I do not feel capable of making more than very general statements regarding the existence of this trend (changes inserted on pages 2 and 3).

Re Comment 3 (page 5): I do not know enough about the “Information Commons” concept to make that connection now. Like SLOs, this is an area I need to read much more about. I especially need to reach an understanding of the difference between “Information Commons” and “Learning Commons.” I like the sound of “Learning Commons” better, but this is just a superficial impression!

Re Comment 4a (top, page 6; “Mentor is a very specific term.”): I added some definitions and discussion of the term on pages 8 and 9.

Re Comment 4b (top, page 6; “I could see how that might work better in a focused college rather than a university.”): I agree that the type of mentoring that I suggest seems to be more likely to succeed in a college atmosphere, which tends to be more intensely focused on nurturing undergraduates. It is interesting that the two examples of library mentoring programs that I found were from large universities. I am not sure how to reconcile this, so I will leave it as an open issue for now.

Re Comment 5 (bottom, page 6): On pages 8–10, I added a paragraph suggesting one way to begin implementing a library mentor system in one particular college. This paragraph mentions the MCC Learning Center faculty tutor program as a possibly helpful starting model for mentor-librarians.

Re Comment 6 (page 9): Thank you! And I very much agree that Sinclair’s Student Success Center is an important model that I could learn from. I sit on committees with Ruth-Marie Quirk from Sinclair—and I have actually (secretly) adopted her as one of my many excellent role models from within the UH system! I see that the Center’s website mentions peer mentoring but not faculty or librarian mentoring—which to me is another indication that the feasibility of the type of mentor program I describe is probably very dependent on things like faculty–student ratio, existing demands on librarians’ time, and of course, resources/budgets. My vision of mentor-librarians is significantly shaped by

my preoccupation with my current small-campus setting and opportunities that I think might actually exist there, despite budget restrictions.

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