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Don't get left behind: Moving library instruction online

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Abstract

With the growing number of online courses and programs across the higher education spectrum, the need to train faculty to effectively design and deliver online courses has become essential to many institutions. However, many professional development options do not include information or support in order to transition the same library services and resources faculty might use in their face-to-face classes to this new environment. The following case study describes professional development for faculty preparing to teach online at one small, private, doctoral-granting institution; how library resources and services were incorporated into the professional development experience; and the overall impressions from faculty who have participated.

Keywords

online education, distance, Blackboard, library instruction, collaboration

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Moving Library Instruction Online
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Abstract

With the growing number of online courses and programs across the higher education spectrum, the need to train faculty to effectively design and deliver online courses has become essential to many institutions. However, many professional development options do not include information or support in order to transition the same library services and resources faculty might use in their face-to-face classes to this new environment. The following case study describes professional development for faculty preparing to teach online at one small, private, doctoral-granting institution; how library resources and services were incorporated into the professional development experience; and the overall impressions from faculty who have participated.

Introduction

Faculty are increasingly moving towards online formats to deliver instruction, but are often unsure of the best ways to organize, create, and deliver course content in this new environment. Allen and Seaman (2013) found 6.7 million students are taking at least one online course, and nearly 70% of academic administration see online learning as strategic to their institution's mission. With this explosion of online course enrollment and push for more online courses and programs, the importance of librarians to serve this population has also grown. How do we offer library services, including library instruction, to faculty when they may no longer be physically present in our libraries, classrooms, and offices? At one small, private, doctoral-granting institution, the Assessment and Online Program Librarian and the Educational Technologist teamed up to showcase the spectrum of services librarians can offer in support of the design and delivery of a fully online course.

With the institutional decision to offer the first fully online program beginning in the fall of 2012, it was necessary to provide professional development and ongoing support for faculty who would be transitioning current face-to-face courses to the online environment. In an effort to provide this level of service, the Educational Technologist role was created within the Office of Academic Affairs in the summer of 2011. As one of the major tasks of this role, the Educational Technologist developed a training experience, modeled after the Online Learning Consortium (formerly the Sloan Consortium, http://onlinelearningconsortium.org/learn/basic-teaching-program/), for the training and development of online faculty. The course, called Fundamentals of Online Teaching, is offered by the Educational Technologist to all faculty who are planning or considering the idea of teaching an online course. Faculty participate in a four-week online

experience where they are exposed firsthand to everything from pedagogy, to time-on-task, to the possibilities an online course can offer to both faculty and students.

The main objectives for using an online method of professional development include: the ability for faculty to experience what it is like to be an online student; an introduction to a variety of best practices, strategies, and technologies faculty may adopt in their own course design; and an exposure to current literature and practice with asynchronous communication among their peers. This online professional development opportunity was first offered in the summer of 2011 and has been offered ten times with over 100 faculty from across the institution completing the course experience. Many of those faculty have gone on to teach a fully online course, while some have used the skills gained from the experience in the design and delivery of technology-enhanced or hybrid course offerings.

With the growing number of online courses offered at the institution, the part-time Assessment and Online Program Librarian position was created in the summer of 2013. This role was designed, not as the direct liaison and sole support for faculty teaching online, but as support for the current liaison librarians collaborating with online faculty. The position also functions as a coordinator of library efforts to provide services to online and distance faculty and students alike. As the Assessment and Online Program Librarian began to organize a repository of digital learning objects for faculty and students, it became clear many online faculty were not aware of the type of research support librarians could provide within fully online courses. Though many faculty may have been frequent patrons of the Library and collaborated with liaison librarians during face-to-face courses, many were unsure how this collaboration might continue when the course was moved online. Therefore, through a partnership between the Assessment and Online Program Librarian and the Educational Technologist, the model used in the Fundamentals of Online Teaching was extended to the role librarians can fill for online information literacy instruction (ILI).

Literature Review

Delivering library services and resources to students and faculty, regardless of proximity to campus, is mandated by the Standards for Distance Learning Library Services (2008), and published by the Association of College and Research Libraries. Methods for delivering library services to students and faculty vary from institution to institution, but what is made clear is that we do need to support these constituents. ILI is one such service students and faculty may have trouble obtaining. Whether through a lack of marketing on the part of library personnel, or lack of faculty collaboration with library instructors, inclusion of library materials and instruction with other materials in online courses is often overlooked (Courtney & Wilhoite-Mathews, 2015; Ismail, 2010; Landry-Hyde & Cantwell, 2013; Shell et al., 2010; Thomsett-Scott & May, 2009). Marketing library resources (e.g. ILI, research support) to faculty can also be a challenge, as typical channels such as email, newsletters, or campus listserv announcements can be easily overlooked or forgotten by faculty. Carrico and Neff (2012) discuss the inherent problems with librarians making contact with distance faculty due to instructor turnover and the oftentimes decentralization of distance education programs from their on-campus counterparts. In fact, many of the researchers discussing successful faculty-librarian collaborations taking place in online courses indicate a previous relationship with the faculty member (Easter, Bailey, &

Klages, 2014; Owens & Bozeman, 2009), thus promoting and making the transition to online ILI easier for both the librarian and the faculty member.

So, where do we form these relationships, and how do we reach unknown faculty members in order to promote inclusion of ILI for online courses? Professional development opportunities for faculty, many times part of a Teaching and Learning Center, offer a wonderful opportunity to market library services to faculty. In particular, workshops and classes offering teaching and training for faculty in online learning pedagogies allow librarians the chance to showcase just how much librarians are able to do in an online class as it relates to ILI. The literature discussing best practices for training faculty how to teach online indicates immersion into the learning management system (LMS) as a student to be one of the best ways faculty learn what works and does not work in an online classroom (Coaplen, Hollis, & Bailey, 2013; Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2011; Kinnie, 2012). Coaplen et al. (2013) in their discussion of creating a training experience for online instructors, point out "the importance of experiencing the role of being online students" (p. 9) as vital to creating the online learning environment. In their examination of the literature concerning online teaching competencies, Baran et al. (2011) found that being placed in the student role helped faculty push the boundaries of their own learning and internalize the new approaches to teaching they were faced with during training and professional development opportunities. In this same vein, including an embedded librarian in these professional development courses allows faculty to view the librarian as a partner in the instructional process (Easter, Bailey, & Klages, 2014; Miller et. al.) and thus transfer this new knowledge to their online teaching practice.

As faculty learn to teach online there are many pedagogical and technological changes with which they are confronted when first developing online courses, including how to make use of the library services in this new environment. Miller et al. (2010) discuss the role librarians play in a five-week, asynchronous workshop for faculty gearing up to teach online. The librarian role is meant to educate faculty about information literacy goals and the integration of information literacy into course assignments. Specifically, Miller et al. (2010) discuss the Center for Teaching and Learning workshops led by subject librarians in cooperation with academic department leaders, where librarians will respond to questions about "library resources, search techniques, facilitating students' use of databases" (p. 834) and department leaders will address "issues of assignment design, [and] classroom management" (p. 834). Using an embedded librarian approach in professional development courses for faculty is one way by which to market library services to distance faculty and gain visibility across campus. Examples of faculty-librarian collaborations abound in the literature for face-to-face classes, and, increasingly, the concept of embedded or blended librarians have shaped how services are offered to online and distance students (Bell & Shank, 2007; Courtney & Wilhoite-Mathews, 2015; Landry-Hyde & Cantwell, 2013; Mune et al., 2015; Tumbleson & Burke, 2010; Easter et al., 2014). Still, marketing these services to faculty, and also teaching faculty how they can be implemented for a virtual classroom setting, can be a challenge. Ritterbush (2014) noted that faculty believe students already know how to use library resources, and subsequently do not include library resources or refer students to the library for instructional support. Additionally, lack of awareness by faculty regarding the array of library services, as noted earlier, is another factor impeding librarian involvement with online courses.

Discussion

Partnership in Professional Development

The Fundamentals of Online Teaching course pre-dated creation of the Assessment and Online Program Librarian position, and thus far had not included a librarian or library module. Following a meeting discussing how best to market the growing library services tailored to the institution's growing population of online students and faculty, the Educational Technologist and Assessment and Online Program Librarian began developing the idea of integrating a library module into the Fundamentals of Online Teaching course. In the spring of 2015 offering of the course, the library module was introduced in the training experience with two main objectives: first, to model the possibilities and best practices of an embedded librarian for a fully online course to teaching faculty; and, second, to showcase the wide variety of services, including video tutorials and assessments, librarians are able to add and customize for courses through collaboration with the teaching faculty. Based on the positive feedback from faculty during the first iteration of the library module in the Fundamentals of Online Teaching course, the partnership was continued and offered again during the summer of 2015.

In the first experience for the library module in the Fundamentals of Online Teaching course, the Assessment and Online Program Librarian and Educational Technologist created a learning module to be completed during the third week of the four-week course. This is also the week in which faculty are asked to participate in a synchronous discussion via Blackboard Collaborate; learn the importance of time management when teaching online, followed by discussion board postings; and read two chapters from the course text, again followed by discussion board postings. For the library learning module, faculty were able to explore the various activities current liaison librarians are offering for online and hybrid courses, read current literature about successful collaborations between librarians and faculty teaching online, and interact directly with the Assessment and Online Program Librarian via discussion boards. In keeping with the purpose of the course, learning by experience, the learning activities adopted for the library module allowed faculty enrolled in the course to interact with the embedded librarian in a similar fashion to that of their future students.

An initial introduction video (link to welcome video: https://youtu.be/KZU_R2AuOeo) was created by the Assessment and Online Program Librarian as a way to introduce herself to enrolled faculty. The video briefly outline the learning module objectives, and highlights successful liaison librarian-faculty collaborations already happening at the institution. Following the introduction video, faculty were asked to read selected literature, for which citations and direct links to full-text were provided, and respond to two discussion board threads. The first of these questions asked faculty to reflect on the two readings: "What surprised you?" and "What was new, or what did you already know about faculty-librarian collaboration?" Specifically, faculty were asked to relate their responses to the selected literature. The second discussion prompt asked faculty to consider how their own teaching practice, especially how it relates to online teaching, might benefit from collaborating more closely with their liaison librarian. They were also encouraged to ask question of the embedded librarian relating to how they might embed their liaison librarians in the future. By prompting faculty to ask questions of the Assessment and Online Program Librarian, the discussion board additionally allowed the

embedded librarian to respond to faculty questions, comments, and concerns about the role librarians play in instruction, further modeling the behavior of an embedded librarian for online courses and showcasing the back and forth conversations that develop in discussion board threads.

Faculty Perceptions

In the spring of 2015, ten faculty participated in the Fundamentals of Online Teaching course, seven of whom completed the evaluation survey following the course experience. In the summer of 2015, seven faculty completed the course, five of whom completed the evaluation survey. This survey provides overall feedback to the Educational Technologist and Assessment and Online Program Librarian on the course experience, specifically what aspects were helpful to faculty learning to teach online for the first time, and what aspects need further adjustment. The following results, from a specific survey question focused on the library module portion of the course, are combined from both the spring and summer 2015 respondents (see Figure 1). Over 90% of the faculty indicated the library module was an exemplary model of how an embedded librarian might be involved in the delivery of an online course. This highly positive response indicated the partnership between the Educational Technologist and Assessment and Online Program Librarian, and the general training approach, was valuable to faculty, and confirmed that this collaborative teaching method should be continued going forward.

Following the generally successful spring 2015 librarian integration, the Educational Technologist and Assessment and Online Program Librarian reviewed faculty concerns regarding the length of the library module which came to light in the post-workshop survey. Faculty, while positive about the readings provided by the Assessment and Online Program Librarian, indicated time-on-task for these readings and follow-up discussion questions was very lengthy, when taken alongside the other assignment for week three. This was something the Educational Technologist noted early in the planning process, and efforts to minimize readings were made on the part of the Assessment and Online Program Librarian. Following the faculty feedback, and subsequent redesign of the library module, the readings were limited to one updated, required case study. Discussion board questions were also revised to one discussion thread. This decision was made based on the repetitive nature of the discussion board prompts and faculty responses during the spring of 2015 offering original two discussion threads. In place of a second reading, faculty were offered the opportunity to review available library learning objects, including video tutorials and quizzes. At this point faculty were not required to watch the videos or take the self-assessments, but were encouraged to view the selected learning objects as possible building blocks to a future online library session. Changes made to the summer of 2015 offering were well-received by faculty who participated in the library module; however, only three out of seven enrolled faculty completed the discussion board questions for the library module, leaving some concern about the length and or applicability of the library module to this cohort.

Conclusion

The addition of the library module to the Fundamentals of Online Teaching course has been well-received by both faculty and librarians alike as a method for promoting and teaching

faculty about library services. The Assessment and Online Program Librarian, during initial planning, anticipated faculty responding positively to published case studies and research, but found faculty in fact responded better to the examples from current practices within the institution. With this in mind, inclusion of more examples of successful online collaborations between librarians and faculty have and will be shared in the Fundamentals of Online Teaching library module.

These success stories include liaison librarians working in partnership with online teaching faculty to create scaffolding learning modules and research support for students, as in the case of the Education Librarian's collaboration with School of Education faculty for online graduate courses. The library module for one such online education course was featured in a campus blog, *Geeking Out at Fisher*, and detailed the collaboration between the Education Librarian and faculty member as they transitioned a 55-minute library instruction session into an online environment. The success stories will also include liaison librarians working with teaching faculty in hybrid and technology-enhanced courses to promote ILI, as in the case of the Science Librarian's collaboration with Biology faculty. In this successful collaboration, the Science Librarian led a short, in-person library session, but performed most student-librarian interaction through the private journaling platform available in Blackboard, in a sustained six-week assignment.

In addition to the required reading changes and inclusion of success stories, having the Assessment and Online Program Librarian take part in the introductions during the first week set the tone for periodic librarian involvement during all weeks of the course. This was an activity both the Educational Technologist and Assessment and Online Program Librarian believed valuable, as it continued to reinforce the idea of the partnership between librarian and faculty, as well as mimic the role of "lurking librarian," a term Markgraf (2004) used to describe the role of the online librarian, and which a former student in the Fundamentals of Online Teaching course found particularly helpful for understanding the positive side of including their librarian in their Blackboard courses. It was likewise important to understand the students' (faculty) motivations, particularly why they had chosen to enroll in the Fundamentals of Online Teaching, and librarian participation in week one allowed for this knowledge. Along these same lines, knowing the departments and or schools to which they belong, and their subsequent relationships with the library and their liaison librarians, has been valuable for marketing library services.

As the Educational Technologist and Assessment and Online Program Librarian continue planning for future iterations of the Fundamentals of Online Teaching course, continued improvements will be made to the library module. For the fall of 2015 offering of the course, some of the changes made include due dates for initial discussion board posts and required responses to classmates. These changes are seen as important for encouraging better discussion between faculty enrolled in the course and the Assessment and Online Program Librarian. One can assume that fostering better discussion between practicing faculty will result in better brainstorming for ways to include a librarian in their online courses. In an effort to further foster this brainstorming and innovation, stories of successful librarian-faculty collaborations across campus will be included to aid in faculty's understanding of how to include a librarian in an online course.

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