Academic Libraries and English Composition Programs: A Literature Review of Current Trends

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ABSTRACT

This literature review examines a sampling of the last ten years of research on the relationships between academic libraries and English Composition Programs in an effort to uncover potential methods for a new collaboration between the Lied Library and the English Composition Program at UNLV. Three general trends are identified and discussed in terms of their strengths and weaknesses for local implementation.

BACKGROUND

As the new Undergraduate Learning Librarian at UNLV, one of the author’s major tasks is to serve as the liaison to the English Composition Program. This literature review was an opportunity to explore various methods for implementing and assessing a library component to an established composition program.

INTRODUCTION

The study revealed three broad categories for the ways that libraries and composition programs interface:
1. “Teaching the teachers”
2. Librarian-created assignment
3. Traditional “one-shot” instruction

Each category advocates for some level of library-driven instruction, but differs in the shape this instruction takes. Each category has strengths and weaknesses in terms of its adaptability to library-composition program collaboration at UNLV.

“TEACHING THE TEACHERS”

What It Is:
A method to support the graduate student instructors who often teach freshmen composition courses.

Why It Works:
Libraries offer orientation workshops and web tutorials to help instructors incorporate information literacy (IL) into their courses.

Why It Doesn’t Work:
Students may be more likely to obtain IL skills from their daily instructor, and practicing IL within the context of the course reinforces these ideas. Graduate students also benefit from learning about available resources.

Who’s Writing About It:


LIBRARIAN-CREATED ASSIGNMENT

What It Is:
An approach where the library composition coordinator or instructor team designs an information literacy assignment for instructors to integrate into their classes. These assignments can take many forms, including a web tutorial with a quiz component, a workbook, or a reflection essay. In many cases, the assignment is introduced and taught during a library instruction session.

Why It Works:
Librarians are able to specifically teach to and assess information learning objectives, which some instructors have difficulty evaluating. It also allows for a tangible demonstration of student learning.

Why It Doesn’t Work:
Librarians are often responsible for the evaluation of these assignments, which can be extremely time consuming at the end of the semester. The assignment must also be carefully integrated into the course curriculum or students will not have a context for the work.

Who’s Writing About It:


“ONE-SHOT” INSTRUCTION

What It Is:
The most traditional interface between the library and an academic program. Librarians create an instruction session that takes the place (or supplements) the course’s typical meeting one time during the semester.

Why It Works:
Many instructors are familiar with this mode of collaboration may even expect it. It also offers an opportunity for students to practice hands-on information literacy skills in the presence of a librarian.

Why It Doesn’t Work:
There may be a point where it is no longer scalable and other means of collaboration are needed. It can also seem out of context for students or produce uneven IL instruction if various librarians and course instructors have different goals for the experience.

Who’s Writing About It:


CONCLUSIONS

These approaches certainly do not stand in opposition to one another and creating a hybrid mode of collaboration is the most applicable process for purposes of working with the English Composition Program at UNLV.

For the first semester of the collaboration, we are going to focus on creating workshops to support composition instructors, a web presence where resources are pooled, and thoughtful instruction sessions that meet student needs for particular assignments.