2010

How to be an E³ librarian

P.S. McMillen
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, psmcmillen.phd@gmail.com

Jennifer L. Fabbi
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, jennifer.fabbi@unlv.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/lib_articles

Part of the Communication Commons, Curriculum and Instruction Commons, and the Library and Information Science Commons

Repository Citation
https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/lib_articles/120

This Postprint is brought to you for free and open access by the Library Faculty/Staff Scholarship & Research at Digital Scholarship@UNLV. It has been accepted for inclusion in Library Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Scholarship@UNLV. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@unlv.edu.
How to be an E³ Librarian

How to be an E³ librarian

P. S. McMillen, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Jennifer L. Fabbi, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Abstract

Embedded librarianship is a relatively new term but is a fairly well-established stance in academic librarianship. While the terminology has certainly spawned new activities and vigorous new channels of communication, few are talking about the strategies for expanding and enhancing the position of the librarian and libraries organizationally once embedded in a course, department or college. A brief literature review of embedded librarianship provides context for this case study, which focuses on strategic hooks for both establishing and enhancing embedded positions in a major university’s College of Education.

Review of the Literature

A report on public radio this morning from an embedded journalist in Afghanistan served as stark reminder of where the term embedded came into daily conversation. Although embedded librarians are not generally in the life and death situations commonly faced by embedded reporters, we do share some common goals. Librarians are increasingly seeking to position themselves closer to the action, specifically where our users are working, whether that is physical locations or virtual workflow locations. The value we place on information literacy (IL) and the rapidly shifting landscape of scholarly communication pushes us to constantly find new paths for instruction and access to information.

Depending on the source consulted (Kesselman & Watstein, 2009; York & Vance, 2009) the term “embedded librarian” first appeared in the library literature in 2004 or 2005, in relation to distance
education. It is safe to say, however, that particular areas of librarianship embodied embeddedness for quite some time before that. Two obvious examples are corporate/agency librarians and clinical (medical) librarians who have long been situated in the work settings and influencing the workflow of their particular constituents (e.g., Arnold, 2008; Brown & Leithe, 2007). Our own review of the literature revealed several trends in academic librarianship, relating to the concept, discussion and practice of embedded librarianship.

Mirroring the “first sighting” reported above, we found that by far the largest part of the conversation focuses on distance education. Half of the articles we identified from our review of the education and library literature on embedded librarians dealt specifically with librarians embedding themselves in online or distance education courses. Owens (2008) and York and Vance (2009) go so far as to define embedded librarianship as integrated course instruction that happens online. Most commonly, librarians become a co-instructor which allows them to participate in discussion forums, post tutorials, and create and grade assignments (e.g. Love & Norwood, 2007; Matthew & Shroeder, 2006). Some interesting variations on this approach have been to participate in a virtual course offered through Second Life (Davis & Smith, 2009) and to have MLIS students “apprentice” in online courses (Lillard, Norwood, Wise, Brooks & Kitts, 2009). One of the ongoing challenges in this approach—as with any move toward greater involvement—is scalability, and some have responded by utilizing more generic learning objects and interaction tools that can be utilized across courses (e.g., Drumm & Havens, 2005). York and Vance (2009) surveyed librarians from 69 different academic institutions in conjunction with a review of the literature to compile a set of best practices for embedded librarianship online.

Another major focus in the embedded librarian literature is on becoming more involved in a face-to-face course. This participation can take numerous forms such as providing more intensive IL instruction via multiple sessions (Hall, 2008), attending all classes along with the students (Cmor &
How to be an E³ Librarian

Marshall, 2006), being a member of a class-based project team (Dugan, 2008), participating in class field work (Smith & Sutton, 2008), taking on instruction and grading responsibilities (Hearn, 2007), collaborating in course design (Winterman, 2009), and various combinations of these activities (Manus, 2009). Anyone familiar with the literature of academic libraries will recognize that these activities are an extension of decades of work to integrate IL instruction into course curricula at increasing levels of sophistication. One noteworthy effort at assessing the effects of face-to-face activities was conducted by Bowler & Street (2008). Varying the amount of interaction with librarians in several undergraduate history and women studies courses, they found that greater levels of “embedment” correlated with better student IL skills, as measured with a shared rubric.

At a higher strategic level are efforts to embed librarians at a department or college level through such endeavors as holding office hours outside the library or even moving the librarian’s office to a department/college (Bartnick, 2007; Freiberger & Kramer, 2009). The challenges increase when subject liaisons are responsible to colleges with multiple locations, calling for electronic as well as physical visits to increase presence and availability to remote patrons and programs (Dutton Ewbank, 2009). Some have also talked about embedding librarians even more broadly into the academic institution at large, noting that librarians need to be active participants—and even leaders—in as many strategic venues as possible (Dewey, 2005; Iannuzzi, 1998; Thompson, 2002; VanderPol, Brown & Iannuzzi, 2008).

Shumaker (2009) provides overall suggestions for getting librarians embedded. These include assessing staff and organizational readiness, using pilot programs to get started, and involving management of all the collaborating parties. As noted above in discussing the challenges of scalability for embedding librarians in online courses, Shumaker also highlights sustainability as a potential pitfall.
How to be an E³ Librarian

Additional concerns are internal equity issues around workload, and maintaining staff cohesion in the face of dispersed worksites (Shumaker, 2009).

Background

The University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) is a mid-sized urban campus, with approximately 30,000 students, which is intentionally seeking to increase its research presence and, at the same time, improve the undergraduate learning experience. The College of Education (CoE) at UNLV is the leading provider of teachers for the Clark County School District, the 5th largest in the nation. Within UNLV Libraries, there has been a focus for several years on our educational role on campus. Library faculty have been able to position themselves to contribute to this mission in significant ways and, in many cases, to assume leadership roles in initiatives such as the following: transforming general education and developing student learning outcomes; shaping the culture of teaching and learning on campus; raising awareness of academic integrity; experimenting in educational assessment; creating programs in writing across the curriculum; and enhancing the first year experience of UNLV students.

From the perspective of the Libraries, the strategic goal has been to “integrate the Libraries into campus educational initiatives, especially those emphasizing student success, universal learning outcomes, and curriculum improvement” (University Libraries, 2009, p. 2). As we have evolved from a subject librarian to a liaison model focusing on outreach to and integration into the college/department and ultimately, the academic program, it has become the responsibility of liaisons to plan how best to establish connections with the discipline-based curricula. It is the charge of individual liaisons to place their specific proposals for incorporation of IL skills in a context that speaks directly to their college or discipline.
How to be an E³ Librarian

Getting Established

In the CoE at UNLV, we were fortunate to have longstanding relationships with administrators and faculty in key positions as well as an understanding of the structure that made entry into these curricular discussions more available. However, we believe it was the early identification of elements at the institution, program, and course levels that allowed us to strategically embed ourselves into the curriculum and that moved this initiative from a series of conversations to a successful and lasting partnership that has continued to evolve over time.

We started first, in January 2008, by creating a proposal modeled after our longest-established IL collaboration at UNLV—one that was based on infusing IL competencies in a general education communications course and that had yielded a fair amount of data on student learning and impact. We also drew on experience garnered from participating in the campus-level creation of new learning outcomes for undergraduate students, which resulted in an inquiry and critical thinking outcome. While these learning outcomes are still in draft form, we were able to share this work with our CoE colleagues as part of our discussions. Additionally, since we would be focusing our efforts specifically on the teacher education program, we knew that preparation for the CoE’s upcoming National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) evaluation with its emphasis on assessment of student learning would be salient. Thus, we leveraged a previous embedded relationship and activities within the larger institutional environment to provide the strategic hooks needed to sell a proposal to the CoE.

It is worth noting that, conversely, embedded relationships at the course or program level can also be utilized to enhance the influence of the library in campus-wide initiatives. We have found that these levels of embeddedness are interrelated and symbiotic.
How to be an E³ Librarian

In order to prepare for discussions, we mapped the teacher education curriculum to identify strategic avenues for integrating IL competencies. While communicating through the department chair and committee structures in the spring of 2008, we were able to educate faculty and elicit feedback on the teacher education program and determine where research “lives” in the undergraduate curriculum. As documented in the research literature, research-based learning in the teacher education curriculum is often done through bridging research and practice (Everett, Luera, & Otto, 2007), or in the form of action research or reflective practice (Gore & Zeichner, 1991), and we found this discipline-specific knowledge to be an important part of our conversation.

While we approached the faculty of the CoE with a plan to integrate IL into the elementary and secondary teacher education curriculum in an intentional way, the identification of a course to begin with was not predetermined. The goal of the proposal was for UNLV teacher education students to share common experiences to develop increasingly sophisticated IL skills over the course of their program, which would also be periodically evaluated. The initial step of the plan would be to choose one core course—one that all students must take—in the teacher education curriculum to address baseline IL competencies. We committed to collaborate with course instructors to implement these competencies by working with students on one assignment within the course and collaborating with the instructors to assess student learning. The ultimate goal of the partnership is to ensure that UNLV teacher education students are successful in their academic pursuits, that they develop skills and dispositions that allow them to become lifelong learners, and that they are able to impart these skills and dispositions to their own students in a developmentally-appropriate way. See Table 1 for the presentation of IL skills for teacher education majors in our original proposal. As of February 2010, there is a draft set of “Information Literacy Standards for PK-12 Pre-service Teachers” being developed by the Instruction for Educators Committee of the Education and Behavioral Sciences Section (Association of
College and Research Libraries—ACRL); however at the time of our proposal, no such agreed-upon standards existed.

The Valuing Cultural Diversity course (EDU 280), which emphasizes culturally-appropriate pedagogical practices, dimensions of multicultural education, and educational implications of diversity, emerged as a good starting point in the curriculum to address and assess IL competencies. Past experiences cooperating with course instructors and an existing research assignment made this course a prime candidate for collaboration. In this course students are asked to write a six-to-seven page “Why Paper” to investigate and understand alternative perspectives about why something is occurring, looking particularly at the perspectives of a cultural group different from their own (Sleeter, Torres, & Laughlin 2004). Students are required to use six sources for this paper, two of which have to be from the perspective of individuals within the cultural group being analyzed. By May of 2008, we had made a commitment to work with the program coordinator to design and pilot a library sub-assignment that would focus on the IL competencies embodied in the student research process for the Why Paper.

Enhancing the Embedded Position

Although it is essential to lay the groundwork effectively to initially embed a librarian in a course or program, it is equally important to consider the strategies for enhancing and expanding that position. Much of this has to do with adding value for your colleagues in the discipline/department. Once course instructors and/or program directors realize that librarians can bring human and intellectual resources to the table in service of shared goals, they can become your ambassadors. There were a number of efforts we undertook to tip the balance in our favor with regard to the EDU 280 program coordinator and the section instructors. Over time, we have continually listened and looked for opportunities to
bolster IL competencies when this was consistent with course learning outcomes and activities. Refer to Table 2 for a timeline of our collaboration to date.

The major library assignment, a “Source Table,” was an expansion of an existing requirement for the Why Paper writing project already in the course. Working with an instructional designer, we crafted a student assignment to be completed after their library session, as well as an accompanying evaluation rubric. The Source Table was designed to address desired learning outcomes of both the course instructors and the library instructors. For example, it required students to identify the voice or perspective of the source creator, reflecting a key concept in the course, i.e., who is privileged to control communication about culture in our society; recognizing point of view or potential bias is also an important IL competency (ACRL, 2000, Std 3.2). Students were directed to and instructed in using databases that potentially represented non-dominant cultural communications such as Ethnic Newswatch and Chicano Database (ACRL, Std. 2.1) The Table assignment also requires students to evaluate the sources critically, which the library also considers an essential aspect of IL (ACRL, Std. 3.2) and was also important to course instructors. Both parties agreed that evidencing appropriate citation behavior was important and so students also had to provide complete and accurate citations in APA style (ACRL, Std. 5.3). We agreed to evaluate the assignments, taking that workload from the instructors, and we negotiated to have the Source Table count as 20% of the total grade for the research-based written paper it supported. See Figure 1 for an example of a row from the Source Table assignment.

The library team developed supporting documents to facilitate the collaboration between the course and library instructors. One example was a flow chart that visually presented the various responsibilities of library vs. course instructors and established the sequence of assignment components; this clarified the process for us, the course instructors and the students. The flow chart also made it easier for course instructors to determine when in the semester to schedule the library
How to be an E³ Librarian

session. We also designed a prerequisite “Concept Map” activity as another way to respond to instructor concerns about student skill gaps and help build student IL skills in a scaffolded fashion. Course instructors lamented that students struggled with formulating good “why questions” to guide their research and writing. Again, working with an instructional designer, we created instructions and a template for the Concept Map assignment which was to be completed and approved by the course instructor prior to the students coming for their library session. Effective use of such tools to create an appropriate search strategy is also an IL competency (ACRL, 2000, Std. 2.2). In-class instruction with the librarian demonstrated how to translate the ideas generated in the Concept Map into potential search queries for electronic databases.

As the collaboration progressed and we encountered additional skill gaps, we would offer ideas, resources and tools to address these. When it became clear that students were really struggling with the critical evaluation of sources—using such criteria as currency, authority, scope, point of view and accuracy—we suggested a smaller scale evaluation exercise wherein the students would be given two articles on a topic and asked to compare them on the various criteria. Most instructors chose to adopt some version of this activity. We even offered to take on teaching/reinforcing important course concepts. The library session now regularly includes an activity that helps students understand the concepts of “insiders” and “outsiders,” and to identify the relative advantages of those positions when it comes to communicating about a particular cultural or ethnic group.

One of our ongoing goals was to minimize the course instructors’ workload related to the library assignment portion of the writing project. We created an online course page using LibGuides (http://guides.library.unlv.edu/content.php?pid=9423&sid=94023), which included the assignments we had designed: the Source Table assignment, the grading rubric for the Source Table, and the Concept Map instructions, template, and rubric. Additional resources were added to the page, such as annotated
database links, information on APA citation style, and links to information on concepts related to the assignment such as how to critically evaluate sources. Centralizing these key pieces of information helped reduce the number of questions that had to be fielded by course instructors. Students could download assignments from the course page, complete the work, and then send the assignment directly to the librarian as an e-mail attachment. Alternatively, students could put the completed assignments into a courseware (WebCampus) “assignment drop box” and the librarian could retrieve them. Both options provided course instructors freedom from handling papers and/or coordinating with the librarian to get the assignments back and forth.

Another advantage of the individualized course page has been to facilitate librarian participation in the online sections of the course offered each term. This participation is still evolving, but at present it involves the librarian moderating a discussion thread around the time that students are expected to be doing the research for their Why Paper. As online tutorials become available for skills that support student use of library resources, they will be added to the course page. For example, a short tutorial on using the new OPAC interface was just added, as was a link to a short video on using concept maps. Distance education students have equal access to these tools. Our own assessment data to date suggests that the online sections are still at a disadvantage, perhaps from not having an actual library session. Initial efforts to create some lecture capture via video or screencasting are underway.

Partnering in assessment of student learning is another powerful way to add value and enhance the librarian’s role in an embedded relationship. About one year into the collaboration, we took the unusual step of submitting a proposal for the entire course team (librarians, course coordinator and instructors) to attend a two-day assessment workshop offered by the Office of Academic Assessment at UNLV. We made the case in our application to allow the entire team to attend instead of a representative from the group, which is the conventional arrangement, and were ultimately successful.
in this effort. Attending this workshop as a team allowed us to clarify for course instructors the process of deconstructing the overall writing assignment into component skills. We then worked collaboratively to create assessment tools—rubrics—for each sub-assignment as well as the overall Why Paper writing assignment. Previously, the only rubric the students had encountered was the one that librarians had developed for the Source Table, although we had offered optional rubrics to accompany the Concept Map and the article critique assignments. This process also helped the instructors see how the library assignment was just one step in building the student competencies to write a research-based paper.

We have compiled assessment data from the library assignment and provided this to the course coordinator and instructors—each term and over time—to demonstrate trends in student learning, and to close the feedback loop with instructors on the impact of IL instruction. Students have in fact shown increasingly higher scores over time as we adjust our emphases in the library instruction session to address problems revealed by previous terms’ assessments. The inclusion of the “Insider/Outsider” teaching activity was one such response. We have also progressively tweaked assignments to clarify aspects that seem confusing to students, primarily by making the instructions on the assignment itself more explicit, offering more explanation of terms, and providing examples of good responses. Throughout the process, the assessment rubric has been available to students so that expectations for performance are transparent. A copy of the rubric, with performance indicators highlighted and points awarded, is returned to students as feedback on their Source Table assignment.

These assessment activities have enhanced the embedded librarian’s position in another way. The College of Education is preparing for NCATE review and has recently moved to utilization of LiveText software as a way to track student performance. Because the Why Paper is designated as a key assignment in this course, providing the quantifiable scores on the library assignment helps the course coordinator assess student learning. Regional accrediting bodies have also increasingly demanded that
higher education institutions document student learning, including specific information on IL competencies (Thompson, 2002). Libraries on campus are not immune from the need to demonstrate their effectiveness, and here at UNLV, the data from the Source Table assignment has become a significant component in the Libraries’ overall assessment reporting each term.

Implications

By understanding and responding to student and instructor needs, we were able to become truly embedded in this course, EDU 280. Rather than a one-time instruction session directed at an end product—the research paper—we collaboratively deconstructed the assignment into meaningful steps to build student IL competencies, and more fully integrate librarians into the teaching process. Based on assessment data, students have profited, and faculty have benefited with an improved product and additional assessment of student learning, available for institutional and accreditation reviews. This collaboration will serve as the foundation for further IL integration throughout the teacher education curriculum at increasing levels of sophistication.

The success of this set of efforts to establish, enhance and expand our embedded position in the EDU 280 course has allowed us to make inroads in other campus venues beyond the CoE. The process and products of this venture have served as models for other library liaisons, for library promotional materials created for donors, and for campus-wide efforts such as our recent three-day institute for faculty who want to include research-based learning in their large enrollment classes. As Shumaker (2009) and others have so rightly pointed out, such success brings challenges. We are currently evaluating our entire range of public services to determine which activities can be delivered in an alternative manner in order to sustain these more labor intensive involvements with our primary users.

Summary
In a manner of speaking, embedded librarianship is an extension of the reference interview that public service librarians have been doing for decades. As David Shumaker (2009) asserts, we build relationships with our patrons to expand our understanding of what their information needs are. However, it is not just a matter of semantics. Being embedded in a course, department, or strategic university initiative is also a response to the reality that our users no longer need to come to the library to get information (Rudin, 2008; York & Vance, 2009). If we are to continue to achieve our mission of providing access and promoting informed use of resources, we must be out there working with patrons — online, in the classroom, at department meetings, and in campus forums. This case study demonstrates how we capitalized on existing embedded relationships to strategically expand and enhance our influence and impact on the educational mission of the institution.
References


How to be an E³ Librarian


How to be an E³ Librarian


Figure and Table Captions

Figure 1: Sample Source Table Assignment for EDU 280 Course

Table 1: Developmental IL Skills for Teacher Education Majors

Table 2. Evolution of our Embedded Position in EDU 280
### Figure 1: Sample Source Table Assignment for EDU 280 Course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool Used to Access Information</th>
<th>Source / Format Type</th>
<th>Position/Perspective of Writer</th>
<th>Insider (I) or Outsider (O)</th>
<th>APA Citation Information</th>
<th>Why (or why not) is this source of information important to your question? Provide 2 distinct reasons for your decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Table 1: Developmental IL Skills for Teacher Education Majors

| Information Competencies (Level 1) | • Search by author, title, and keyword in library online catalog and locate relevant items  
• Conduct a search in a general education database (e.g., Academic Search Premier)  
• Understand the concepts behind searching simple keywords or phrases and the use of Boolean operator “and”  
• Revise topic and/or strategy if search results are unsatisfactory  
• Use database features to mark/save/print/email citations and link to full text  
• Demonstrate preliminary evaluation abilities; an understanding that audience, bias, author and context play a role in source credibility  
• Cite sources properly according to appropriate style guide |
| Information Competencies (Level 2) | • Develop a focused topic and strategies for obtaining needed information  
• Identify relevant keywords and controlled vocabulary terms for searching a topic  
• Interpret catalog and database search results; link from subject headings to find additional resources  
• Gather background information in print and online reference-style works  
• Identify relevant subject databases, e.g., ERIC, and execute a basic search  
• Evaluate information sources by criteria such as: relevance, authority, currency, peer review process and differentiate between primary and secondary sources |
| Information Competencies (Level 3) | • Identify relevant subject databases (including those not exclusively focused on education) and execute a basic search  
• Conduct a comprehensive literature review for papers/projects, including books, journal articles, dissertations, technical reports, non-print media, etc.  
• Analyze a body of research literature, drawing conclusions and developing new insights  
• Use advanced search features of subject databases  
• Select and use vocabulary specific to the discipline for searches  
• Perform cited reference searches in order to follow a research topic forward and backward in time  
• Use citation manager software as appropriate  
• Describe how research literature is generated and disseminated in the discipline  
• Identify investigative methods in the discipline  
• Use research collections beyond the local library when needed (e.g., special libraries and archives)  
• Apply ethical and legal principles to the use of information in all formats and contexts (e.g. ethics of using online transcripts; recorded speeches; cost of information barriers, etc.) |
| Information Competencies (Level 4) | • Understand information literacy standards for K-12 student learning as appropriate to the grade level of instruction  
• Integrate these standards into instructional planning as required  
• Collaborate with the school librarian to teach these information literacy skills to K-12 students |

NOTE: These are higher order competencies that might be appropriate for 400-level courses.
## Table 2. Evolution of our Embedded Position in EDU 280

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>January 2008</th>
<th>Creation and first presentation of a proposal for infusing IL competencies into the teacher education curriculum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2008</td>
<td>Communication of the proposal through the department chair and committee structures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2008</td>
<td>Commitment to work with EDU 280 course to design and pilot a library assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2008</td>
<td>First pilot of IL integration with one section of EDU 280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2008</td>
<td>First semester with all five sections, implementing Concept Map and Source Table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2009</td>
<td>Second semester with all five sections; opportunity to make small revisions to assignments based on student and instructor feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2009</td>
<td>Professional development opportunity for faculty and librarians to collaboratively create assessment tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2009</td>
<td>Implementation of LiveText and preparation for NCATE continues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2010</td>
<td>Work on lecture capture and screencasting to enhance library experience for distance sections of the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Use of student assessment data to refine the student learning experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>