

Oh, the humanities: Understanding information behavior to foster information literacy

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Information literacy (IL) is a crucial pedagogical issue in higher education despite the fact that it may not be recognized as such by educators outside of a library setting. Thus, the ability of instructional librarians to develop and promote content- and context-specific information literacy sessions with a clear collaborative emphasis directly affects the role of the library as a viable and visible agent of learning within the university. This essay focuses on promoting an understanding of, and partnership with, a particularly important group of patrons—humanities scholars and students. By examining the unique information behavior of humanists, including their characteristic research aims and methods, the author maintains that instructional librarians should have the knowledge necessary to increase the authenticity and relevancy of IL services, as well as the opportunity to strengthen a range of related outreach efforts.

Keywords: collaboration, humanities, information behavior, information literacy, instruction, librarian, research, technology.

INTRODUCTION

Among the most pressing issues affecting academic libraries with a teaching mission, the problem of creating and fostering robust information literacy (IL) programs continues to come to the fore, as evidenced by a 15% increase in total library and information science scholarship addressing the topic (Stevens, 2007, p. 254). However, as Christine Bruce (2001) revealed, IL has yet to become a “mainstream educational issue” of serious interest for “most educators outside of the library (p. 113). In some respects, then, the likelihood of the library remaining a viable teaching partner within the university community remains contingent upon the ability of librarians to help patrons better understand and master the essentials of IL. Among the most important groups to address, librarians should now look to an old, but neglected, friend—the humanities. Historically, the humanities have been one the library’s greatest allies. However, many humanists now face a relationship crisis as their disciplines evolve and the library struggles to adequately redefine its role to meet an increasingly diverse set of needs. Indeed, as Carole L. Palmer and Laura J. Neumann (2002) suggested, “the humanities offer an optimal test bed” for libraries looking to develop their collections, tools, and services to meet the shifting requirements of patrons (p. 112).

With these considerations in mind, this essay aims to characterize the information behavior (IB) and research needs of humanists in order to demonstrate how IL programs can better partner with them. The discipline of English is used to exemplify some common aspects of the humanist’s IB, and consider an example of a graduate student in particular in order to illustrate this IB and explore ways to best employ an IL program in the context of the humanities. This essay, then, illustrates how the library can assist with the research and teaching needs of a specific group while also suggesting useful

services for a range of disciplines and audiences within the humanities, including faculty and undergraduates. In short, it is beneficial for librarians to take an informed, energetic approach to reconnecting and ultimately collaborating with humanists. Not only does such a change allow for better service, it also helps to ensure solid support for the library struggling to secure a place of prominence in the face of indifferent, infrequent, or ill-informed patrons.

From the outset, it must be noted that a great portion of the struggle to meet the needs of humanities scholars can be diminished if librarians take the time to adjust their perception of this group. One need only consider how librarians on the BI-L [ILL] listserv consistently demonize this group by contending that its members are, at turns, lazy, incompetent, short-sighted, snide and imperious to witness this persistently negative sense of stereotyping (Julien and Given, 2002/2003, p. 77-78). While there is little doubt that the humanities contains its fair share of apathetic or even antipathetic members, some of the common assumptions and pervasive claims made by librarians regarding this group are based on little more than outdated perceptions, myths, or even grudges. It is clear, however, that librarians cannot overcome this self-defeating attitude unless they cast aside distortions in order to ascertain the true information habits of this group and develop tenable approaches to support their work. Thus, we begin by fairly examining the relationship humanists maintain with technology.

HUMANISTS AND THE QUESTION OF TECHNOLOGY

It may indeed be true that humanities scholars will continue to rely upon certain types of physical materials for research in the foreseeable future. There are many reasons for this situation, including the fact that complicated texts which must

be extensively and repeatedly studied tend to be less than reader-friendly in an e-book format. If we consider, for instance, a humanist's desire to analyze digital representations of works, assuming these works are available digitally at all, it becomes evident that surrogates oftentimes fail to offer the same ease of use and communicative fidelity as physical objects. For example, it might be difficult for a classics scholar to muster the desire and eye-strength required for him or her to comfortably read and annotate an e-book version of a long work such as the *Illiad* using existing technology such as a PDF file on an average computer monitor. Palmer and Neumann (2002) observe that humanists also favor browsing archives in person to get a feel for what surrounds any given work and seek to interact with "information specialists who are knowledgeable about the collections and other scholars who work on-site with the sources" in a bid to both expand the breadth and depth of their inquiry and understanding (p. 101).

However, it is also evident that with an increase in the variety and quality of digitization and digitally born documents that are amenable to their many needs and uses, the chance that humanists will consciously sidestep technology grows ever slimmer (Johnson and Magusin, 2005, p. 31). For example, with the ability of new e-book readers to magnify text size, search for phrases and offer other attractive features unavailable in a static, print format, products such as iRex's iLiad or Amazon's Kindle have increasingly begun to provide a handy means for some humanists to store and scan through digital libraries. Despite some issues with usability, tools such as these are gaining popularity among humanists and will likely continue to do so as their applicability, flexibility and reliability increase. In fact, as a recent study points out, the single largest factor deterring humanists from fully adopting such technologies is "the inadequacy [...] to support their research needs" (Baruchson-Arbib and Bronstein, 2007, p. 2274). If librarians can alter their interactions in order to meet these needs, humanists will most likely approach new and emerging technology with less trepidation and they will increasingly perceive the library as a place for professional development.

As Palmer and Neumann (2002), and William S. Brockman and others (2001) observe in their studies of the humanist's relationship to the information environment, humanists as a whole continue to consciously and thoroughly embrace technologies which clearly support their research and pedagogy (p. 110; p. 28-29). Unfortunately, however, some librarians have not noticed or accepted this actuality, immersed as they are in the old myths of the fusty book-bound professor lamenting the passing of some pre-microprocessor golden age. Such a view represents an "oversimplification at best" that does little to encourage mutual understanding and collaboration (Brockman and others, 2001, p. 18). In fact, as Andy Barrett (2005) showed, graduate students and younger faculty in the humanities see a "generation gap" within their

departments and continue to witness a rapid change of guard, one where technology is seen as all but requisite to research and teaching success, and one where electronic information technology itself is becoming an intense subject of research.

One need only consider how on any given day a typical humanist may use WebCT, Blackboard, Desire2Learn, or similar systems for classroom management, peruse electronic journals, blogs, and discussion lists like those available on H-Net (<http://www.h-net.org/>) to keep up with new developments in the field, and email colleagues and students to understand that the image of the luddite humanist fails to cohere. To further underscore this fact, Palmer and Neumann (2002) showed that the complex nature of the humanist's IB has lead these scholars to use an uncommonly wide array of technological resources on a consistent basis (p. 98-100). If we add to this situation the increasing number of universities offering distance-learning courses, it is easy to see that this engagement with technology continues to grow, as does the related need for technological training and IL instruction at all levels. Perhaps these realities lend further credence to John W. East's (2005) assertion that technology is essentially ubiquitous and well-received among humanities scholars, and that to judge otherwise only inhibits the collaboration needed for productive IL programs. However, like most groups, even the most "search-savvy scholars" within the humanities face difficulties learning unfamiliar systems or those that lack user-friendliness (Brockman and others, 2001, p. 22). In summary, like all effective educators, librarians must identify the challenges posed by the tools, search techniques, and information needs of the audience they wish to reach.

THE NATURE OF INQUIRY AND IB OF HUMANISTS

Once the luddite stereotype has been dismantled, assessing the IB of humanists becomes a revealing exercise. A useful way to begin constructing an overall framework that exhibits how humanities scholars operate within the library is to consider Peggy Keeran's (2007) succinct definition of the nature of their work: "Humanities research is primarily qualitative rather than quantitative, acknowledging multiple perspectives and paradigms about our cultures that reflect the diversity of the human condition." (p. 1). Two of the key words from her definition—*qualitative* and *diversity*—absolutely apply to working humanists, be they undergraduates or Regents Professors, and they nicely identify both the goals and approaches which drive their scholarship.

Within this purview, we can then understand the humanist's tendency to seek out subjective interpretive elements of an artifact, often as they apply to particular discourse communities. As humanities scholars do not attempt to arrive at a "definable fact" so much as "a critical perspective that they might find relevant or stimulating," the librarian must recognize that there may be no absolute answers to the inquiries

humanists wish to explore in an IL session and that there may be many ways to arrive at sound scholarship (Brockman, 2001, p. 19). The librarian, then, should be concerned with the process of locating multiple perspectives, canonical and otherwise, to help inform the search and discovery process. In this respect, it is important for the librarian to maintain an open mind regarding what constitutes legitimate resources according to the humanities. Additionally, a librarian must take cues from those resources rather than refusing to recognize their place in a research scenario where the word “academic” would seem to imply austere limitations. As such, it is imperative to consider that inquiry in this context is also a matter of joining an “ongoing conversation” where scholars may examine many facets of a question using an array of resources. Keeran (2007) summed this idea up nicely:

Humanities researchers require access to a wide variety of resources, from the most canonical texts to ephemera. Their needs are not bound by time or format. Books and periodicals play a vital role in all humanities research, while microforms, digital audio files, texts and images, films, documentaries, and audio tapes all have their place as well...Books are still the primary format for communicating within the humanities. But as is generally true in publishing overall, the latest theories and discussion of emerging movements and artists arises through the periodical literature (p. 9).

Add to this dynamic the reality that “the humanities is becoming more cross-disciplinary,” as East (2005) noted, or even “highly heterogeneous,” as Palmer and Neumann (2002) showed, and we begin to recognize the complexities of humanistic inquiry (p. 136; p. 99). Such complexities, of course, must be kept in mind if we are to meet their needs in a truly meaningful fashion.

THE IL SESSION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE HUMANIST’S IB

It is certainly true that librarians who work with “different populations” must be aware of the distinctions among patrons, ranging “from the novice to the transitional graduate student to the expert” in order “to help alleviate anxiety and to educate and validate the various approaches to research” (Keeran, 2007, p. 7). However, if we study the “transitional” figure among humanists—the graduate student—we can derive important behavioral information and develop productive training practices that can be used to support the other populations, especially since this figure has more “sophisticated” needs than undergraduates and perhaps simpler needs than those of faculty, thus comprising a useful middle way for us to explore (Glynn and Wu, 2003, p. 125). Approaching the graduate student also gives us an opportunity to discover inroads into developing and promoting IL programs among undergraduates and faculty members, especially if those graduate students

hold teaching assistantships (Barrett, 2005). Therefore, in order to foreground a reasonably representative sense of a humanist’s IB, as well as to explore how instructional services may be applied to his or her needs in the context of IL, we examine a scenario involving a Master’s candidate in English, one with a particular emphasis in Film Studies.

Because we are working with a graduate student, certain factors must come into consideration. In terms of resources, the student is privy to some informational channels of the “invisible college,” which essentially consists of her contacts among classmates, mentors and colleagues. In addition, being younger typically than most faculty members, this student has most likely grown up in a generation steeped in computers and the Internet, which further heightens her desire and ability to employ and adapt the manifold benefits of technology discussed by Palmer and Neumann (2002). Finally, like graduate students regardless of the generation, our graduate student is inundated with work, be it related to taking classes, teaching, or participating in professional development.

For the purposes of a paper over *The Usual Suspects*, our student may require an assortment of detective novels and stories reaching back to the 18th century, including now obscure texts of the pulp fiction variety; anthologies over reader response theory; psychological case studies; film history and popular culture journals; video and audio clips of interviews with the film’s actors and director; DVDs; film stills; and Internet fan sites, among many other resources, some of which she may not even know she needs at the moment. Suffice it to say, the multifaceted needs of our graduate student share many characteristics with those of her professors and the undergraduates in the English program.

Despite the fact that she may use the library quite a lot, the importance of IL and any desire to engage in library training sessions may not exactly register at this point. In addition, even though our student may enjoy teaching, especially upper level courses, the reality for this Master’s candidate is that her own studies come before those of the undergraduates whom she teaches. With this background and her priorities in mind, we examine how she approaches her studies and teaching. We then show how this knowledge can be transferred into a fruitful IL program that meshes a discipline and course specific “Content Frame” with a “Personal Relevance Frame” that supplies her experience with significant points of relation (Bruce, Edwards and Lupton, 2006, p. 3-5).

CONCEPTUALIZING THE IL SESSIONS

Specialized, participatory IL sessions which are conducted in succinct but increasingly sophisticated phases would be of great help to our graduate student as she starts to work on her paper. Such a scenario might be constructed as a specific

supplement to our graduate student's film course, but it might be better served as a recommended or even required unit for said course (Forbes, 2007, p.229). Of course, in order to make IL a required and altogether valuable part of any non-library course, librarians must work closely with those faculty members who "form the conduit for the integration of information literacy into the curriculum" (Samson, 2010, pp. 209-210). Ideally, the library has a subject specialist and liaison who already has a relationship with the humanities scholars to assist with this transition. In the case of our graduate student and her classmates in the film course, it would be profitable to assign a subject specialist versed in English to this task. While subject specialists are not always compulsory, as James K. Elmsborg (2003) notes, their inclusion certainly gives the session a nuanced relevancy and endorses the library's position as an invested party in the discipline's interests (p. 75).

From the start, the librarian charged with reaching out to these students should focus the IL lessons on resources applicable to the course content and create exercises and execute search scenarios based upon the needs of each of the students, which would by nature overlap in many respects and thus ensure some sense of continuity during the session. This sense of focus means that our librarian should study syllabi, identify course objectives and understand the writing prompts for assignments. In this spirit, a short, survey-style reference interview with the professor and even the students should occur before the sessions so that our librarian can arrive at a reasonably informed understanding of the audience's particular approaches and needs, not one based upon assumptions or vague generalities. For example, our librarian could consult and fine tune questions for the film class like those in Palmer and Neumann's (2002) "General Interview Guide", such as "What research areas do you keep current in?" and "How do you use the material you collect?", in order to help understand the audience at hand (p. 113). In addition to planning out each session based on details from the class, our librarian should, like any knowledgeable and well-prepared educator, be able to improvise given the needs of the students. This approach to IL, while not exclusively "personal" in the terms of being entirely tailored for an individual, is personal enough insofar as it takes into account particular interests of the participants and thus provides a greater degree of satisfaction for them.

Although teaching humanities scholars the basics of using search terminology in databases and imparting other such useful but generic tips might have some merit in this IL session, our librarian must be aware of significant pitfalls with taking the broad-based approach, which substitutes a one-size-fits-all response for a solution that should be much more specific and refined. The first of these problems comes from adopting content-based approaches to IL training from other universities or programs without critical evaluation of local requirements. An IL session of substance should certainly address the

learning outcomes outlined by the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (ACRL 2000). However, these standards are only of use if the librarian has great familiarity with the university's courses and closely collaborates with in-house experts so that each session speaks to genuine needs. Snatching an attractive IL presentation from another institution whole cloth and dressing up the session in its silky opulence may do little more than provide an inappropriate and altogether awkward fashion show for people interested in learning more about the attire that suits their own occasion.

Along with this potential mistake, any decision to solely focus on the "grammar" or "product" side of searching rather than its critical thinking aspects and creative processes would likely undermine the possibility for real engagement and long-term learning to occur in the IL scenario (Elmsborg, 2003, p. 72-73). Simply taking participants like our graduate student through ways to uncover facts such as the box office earnings of *The Usual Suspects* may be rather useless when they are concerned with questions such as whether the film can be read as an ironic undermining of the formulaic narrative conventions of detective fiction. Such a reality means librarians should remain aware that "the question being asked and explored determines the needs of the individual" (Keeran, 2007, p. 2). In this respect, as Ann Grafstein (2002) pointed out, while finding evidence has a definite place in IL, the desirable goal even at the undergraduate level is often to "propose original solutions" which "actively contribute to the knowledge-base of the discipline."

REFINING THE IL SESSIONS

Once the librarian has arrived at a tenable approach, he or she should bear in mind further factors which influence the outcome of the IL session. One of these key factors, as East (2005) showed, comes about when we consider the search techniques of humanists. These techniques tend to be "sophisticated," yet humanists often face problems with framing their queries in such a way as to hone in on the information that they require: a large part of this problem lies in the fact that humanists are more apt to employ natural language rather than controlled vocabulary, which makes sense given the nature of their relationship with language (East, 2005, p. 136). Brockman and others (2001) supported this view by concluding that they employ "their limited knowledge of the search systems and their extensive knowledge of the search topic to milk every bit of information available" (p. 23). The job of our librarian, then, is to tap into this deep expertise and create a confluence between it and the pool of useful search processes that librarians enjoy rather than solely discussing Boolean operators. Such a tactic is the equivalent of our student lecturing us on the use of conjunctions and forsaking the bigger picture that makes writing a pleasure for some people.

Given our graduate student's understanding of her subject and her ability to sufficiently narrow the topic and devise a writing strategy, the librarian should not feel compelled to take her through every step of Carol Collier Kuhlthau's (2004) information search process. In fact, as Shifra Baruchson-Arbib and Jenny Bronstein noted (2007), humanists rarely consider the librarian "a major resource of information [...] at the initial phase of the information-seeking process" (p. 2273). The main task at this point in the process, then, should be to focus on those ever important and tricky middle steps that Kuhlthau (2004) delineates: exploration, formulation and collection (pp. 193-194). Because these steps concentrate on the increasing refinement of ideas and language so that they can be successfully articulated in the search system, they are in many ways the most vital yet least understood aspects of the process.

Rather than merely showcasing generic search shortcuts, the instructional librarian should focus on showing our student how to "see" the whole search, which would fall into levels #4 and #5 of Kuhlthau's (2004) intervention model: "addressing a particular problem or task" through a "strategy for navigating" and "the holistic experience of seeking meaning within the process of an information search" (p. 201). Given the IB of humanists, this session should provide a nice transition from the way they envision information to the way IL frames it. Certainly, if we consider the relative flexibility of the humanities when it comes to pursuing a particular perspective on an issue, not to mention the humanist's tendency to approach research from various angles, then our focus on these segments of Kuhlthau's frameworks should prove beneficial.

Picking up from those middle stages of Kuhlthau's (2004) process framework, our librarian can, if the situation warrants it, move to the final "presentation" and "assessment" stages of the search (pp. 194-195). Asking students to examine the appropriateness of their resources in the context of their assignment can be a fruitful exercise that makes full use of their critical thinking skills and helps them to further visualize how the research process applies to their finished product. Formally joining this portion of the writing process to the research process at a later date by having students bring in their prewriting and working drafts so that they might discuss how the search process informed, reformed or even radically altered their initial ideas could prove to be edifying.

Presentation coupled with the sort of reflection that Kuhlthau (2004) advocates would certainly allow students to consciously recognize how their research methods can determine the shape of their papers (p. 195). A clear instance of this recognition could come about when students are given an opportunity to directly address how something as seemingly simple as finding limited support for their initial thesis in a single database dissuades them from pursuing their arguments as they had

planned. Even though they may have a gut feeling that the support is "out there," they may seek the path of least resistance by latching onto a different thread of discourse they encountered during the search process and going with it. For some students, especially those who are perfectionists, airing the anxiety associated with such a switch in direction may open up some useful dialogue (Jiao and Owuegbuzie, 1998). Explicitly addressing such changes could also help students reflect on the way their IB determines the nature and quality of their work, while also explaining and reinforcing the relevance of continued IL training in their lives as scholars and educators.

With the former scenario in mind, it is evident that such a shift in direction, while perhaps partially attributable to unsatisfactory searches, may not appear troublesome for those humanists who enjoy browsing and embracing the serendipitous discoveries which come from reading around a topic (Keeran, 2007, p. 21). This approach to research, as Barrett (2005) describes it, may be characterized as "non-linear" and therefore problematic in terms of interacting with databases. Given both of these issues, it would be in the best interest of both librarians and humanists to work on translating the researcher's thought processes into techniques that can usefully manipulate the database without sacrificing the unique aspects of humanistic inquiry. We can, in short, enrich their experience by illustrating the idea that research is indeed a matter of discovery and also a process that can acquire greater exactitude and, therefore, produce a more satisfactory range of "lucky finds" along the way.

Many humanities scholars also see digital materials as useful but generally less valuable than print collections because these resources do not appear to offer easy or accurate browsing opportunities (Brockman and others, 2001, p. 13). With this perspective in mind, a librarian should demonstrate how different approaches to the research process create distinct browsing opportunities and distinct impressions of a research question. For example, a librarian could take a working question from the group and show students how to browse by utilizing subject headings and other metadata in a variety of databases. At this stage in the search, students could be asked to consider the results of their browsing, re-examine their inquiry and approach, and once again formulate their search. Kuhlthau (2004) calls this "formulation" the "turning point" of research and it is perhaps the one area that truly tests the librarian's ability to communicate the essence of IL (p. 194).

By taking an issue directly rooted in the work of participants, such as our graduate student's analysis of *The Usual Suspects*, this lesson would gather importance by illustrating its immediate applicability and establishing a research continuum. This clear sense of relevancy would, in turn, also promote a sense of ownership among participants. Besides supplying participants

with the means to acquire the knowledge that they need, this sense of ownership, as Christy R. Stevens (2006) contends, helps to promote IL across the university by “function[ing] as a framework for addressing the kinds of reading, writing, research, and critical thinking issues that they are confronted with in their classrooms and in their students’ work” (p. 257). The opportunity for the librarian to promote an expanded emphasis on IL certainly arises with this scenario, especially if our graduate student passes on the lesson to her students and refers them to the library.

Another way to ensure representative training for this group is to avoid limiting their search attempts to the library’s usual suspects for English studies—JSTOR, Literature Online, Project MUSE, and the like. Again, our librarian must know the audience involved, recognizing that alternative means to exploration and discovery are well within the purview of the humanities. Keeran (2007) supports this idea by arguing that local union catalogs, WorldCat, Google Scholar, personal websites and the popular press, among other resources, are attractive to humanities scholars and should not be overlooked when carrying out IL sessions (p. 12). This emphasis on the process of perpetual discovery in its varied forms, as opposed to pinning down pat absolutes, would make sense to our graduate student who understands process in terms of composition and rhetoric, as well as the subjective nature of authority as it is applied to the products of popular culture. This emphasis would also help her to gain an even better insight into the knowledge cycle and gain a sense of the library’s relevancy to the overall scheme of lifelong learning. It would, in short, ring true to her experience, which is one of the requisites of reaching learners.

When giving an IL session of this variety, it is vital that our librarian go through the process in traceable stages, taking the time to build knowledge through clear, well-developed steps. However, it is equally important that the librarian note that these stages do not form a strict hierarchy in order to prevent students from feeling bound to a formula that may not always fit their question. Clear but realistic communication of this variety has been shown to be of utmost importance to developing IL. According to Brockman and others (2001), studies show that “when online searches were mediated by librarians, it sometimes was not apparent which databases they were searching, or how.” (p. 19) “Such an issue,” as they add, “points to the need for landmarks that can help guide scholars to appropriate materials and for ‘smart’ search tools that use thesauri to expand search terms or that can build profiles to help users” as they move through a process that may become unwieldy and overwhelming (Brockman et al., 2001, p. 19). Such teachable moments should not be lost because the librarian lacks the tools, preparation, presence of mind, or time to present the lesson at hand in a carefully articulated steps.

TEACHING AND RESEARCH TOOLS AS IL OUTREACH

One of the simplest and most useful ways to further shape the IL of our graduate student would be to introduce tools which support her studies and protect her artifacts. To this end, part of any well-rounded IL program should consist of training scholars to better manage and store their work by employing tools made expressly for those purposes. Such offerings do exist and may be useful to widely varying degrees but, as Palmer and Neumann (2002) noted, a complete understanding of how these tools may be best utilized given the nature of scholarship in the humanities is far from complete (p. 112). To this end, East (2005) showed that humanities scholars increasingly utilize programs such as EndNote to manage their citations and generally ease the burden of developing their research; however, even with such tools widely available, many scholars remain unaware of their existence or may lack enough familiarity with them to appreciate their ultimate value (p. 138). Part of the librarian’s job, then, is to promote awareness and familiarity with these tools among those who would truly benefit from them.

In addition, the librarian could assist humanists with Web 2.0 and course management tools, support scholarly communication through institutional repositories, and facilitate access to a digital library as part of the IL program. Such convenient informational hubs would allow humanists, such as our graduate student, to chase and chain citations, as well as fine tune, store, and access materials necessary for research—including that growing thesis—among many other common tasks in a fairly efficient and seamless fashion (Keeran, 2007, p. 5). The “[v]aluable intellectual property” that concerns humanists, as Brockman and others (2001) discussed in their study, could be managed by “supplying repositories for scholars’ personal files that, given the rapid upgrading of hardware and software, are at risk” (p. 25). This same study explained that “a small digital library collection of secondary and reference texts, services that support personal acquisition and markup of key primary texts, and sophisticated functions for recording and tracking the intellectual work involved in rereading acquired texts” would be particularly desirable for humanities scholars (Brockman and others, 2001, p. 32). These scholars, who must juggle hundreds of texts while attempting to annotate and compose drafts, would no doubt find ongoing IL sessions targeted at simplifying their lives and enriching their work worth their time. Such offerings would also encourage them to attach greater importance to library services.

Once the library does involve itself in the IL associated with these tools, librarians must remain aware that many users may indeed see the benefit of these tools but forsake or pensively approach them out of a sense of frustration or even fear, thus reinforcing the idea that instructional librarians must diligently

and consistently promote and provide their services. As a study conducted at the University of Iowa showed, a failure in either of these areas leads to the largest reason that users avoid such tools: a conspicuous “lack of information and training” (Washington-Hoagland and Clougherty, 2002, p. 631). Furthermore, for those humanists who perhaps justifiably maintain reservations about certain aspects of technology while heartily embracing others, the library’s mediation, especially if it is a familiar partner in other endeavors, could provide much needed relief for those venturing into such systems (Brockman and others, 2001, p. 28-30). Indeed, librarians should help dissolve any “affective barriers” and “mechanical barriers” which impede progress (Jiao and Onwuegbuzie, 1998, p. 366). Some libraries do offer tutorials and services oriented towards assisting students and even faculty in this regard. However, the promotion of and assistance with these technologies should become a primary and ongoing responsibility among instructional librarians, not only to touch on every aspect of the user’s engagement with information or, as Owusu-Ansah (2004) advocated, their “total research environment,” but also to further underscore the idea that the library is a workspace where information is discovered, explored, developed, collected, safeguarded, and disseminated.

GENERATING COLLABORATION

Now that we have some idea of how humanists operate and ways to reach them through several key aspects of an IL program, it is time to consider the practical but oftentimes arduous task of establishing a constructive collaborative relationship with this group. As library literature bears out, one of the most troublesome obstacles preventing a strong bond between the library and the humanities is a feeling of inferiority on the part of librarians. A portion of this problem may be due to some members of the faculty being dismissive of librarians. However, a portion of it may also be due to the insecurities of librarians themselves who, for various complex personal and professional reasons, struggle with their own roles in higher education and develop an adversarial relationship with patrons as a consequence. Examining the nature and possible remedies for this self-image problem is the first step to better developing and maintaining a solid IL program where students, teaching faculty, and librarians are all able to benefit on a consistent basis. With this goal in mind, we examine some of the larger causes for this disconnection.

It appears that after experiencing conflicts with a few faculty members and perhaps indifference on the part of others, some librarians have developed what Julien and Given (2002) characterized as “a deep level of disrespect for the faculty” and have created “an irreconcilable dichotomy” (p. 83). Edward K. Owusu-Ansah (2004) addressed this issue of negative perception by writing that “librarians [...] see themselves operating in environments populated by ceaseless phantasms

of opposition.” In a less gothic fashion, William Badke (2005) characterized these librarians who “can’t get no respect” as the “Rodney Dangerfields of the academic world” and noted that numerous surveys indicate librarians believe other faculty have no idea of what librarianship entails and just how important it is to teaching and research (pp. 64-65). In a field that is experiencing an identity crisis in some respects and struggling to define itself within the larger picture of higher education, such misunderstandings are inevitable, and it goes without saying that even the most well-educated, capable librarians cannot but feel a bit defensive at times when their hard work lacks the recognition conferred to other professionals in other areas.

Thus, with a quick twist, librarians may perceive an exclamation of opposition where there is only a question of purpose, especially when their overtures for collaboration are inadequately articulated or enacted. In short, even if no outright opposition exists, apathy or even simple ignorance on the part of humanists can hinder the work of librarians and embitter them along the way. However, librarians should not take this lack of acknowledgement as a personal affront. In fact, a recent study by Scott Walter (2008) shows that many librarians with instructional duties continue to struggle with developing a clear “teacher identity” even within their own ranks. Such a situation only underscores the gap between the way librarians may perceive themselves and the way they may be perceived by other teaching faculty. If we add the fact that the whole concept of IL may have little to no “cultural currency” outside of the library, we will discover a definite problem of value recognition among faculty (Stevens, 2007, p. 255).

FOSTERING COLLABORATION

Bruce (2001), Julien and Given (2002/2003), and Stevens (2007) all argued that the success of a collaborative relationship among the library and various academic departments falls squarely on the shoulders of librarians. Stevens (2007) maintained that librarians must earnestly and consistently take the time “to understand faculty culture, to be sensitive to faculty concerns, and to develop creative strategies for overcoming resistance” if they are realistically to expect faculty to understand the importance of IL and achieve any progress (p. 256). Fortunately, as surveys such as Glynn and Wu’s (2003) indicated, most faculty, although they may not be able identify IL as librarians understand it, do rate the importance of communicating with library liaisons, including those involved in IL services, as “very useful”, which if anything should prove promising for those librarians who feel marginalized (p. 124). Thus, it is clear that one of the biggest factors in cultivating a better developed, more collegial sense of collaboration comes down to having well-qualified instructional librarians with well-considered, subject-specific IL plans push their liaison services to the fore while remaining flexible enough to deal with the potential

changes, challenges, and even criticisms that must necessarily come about during these negotiations.

Rather than hiding from their peers and grumbling about their treatment, librarians must approach these negotiations with confidence and a clear sense of purpose. They should be prepared and willing to “sell the value of [...] IL programs to the people these programs are designed to help” without always expecting immediate rewards (Grassian and Kaplowitz, 2005, p. 62). The eventual outcome of such mutually beneficial “sales” would establish an atmosphere of cooperation that would be able to support and advance the particulars of IL while meeting a wide range of educational goals regardless of whether those goals are part of the English curriculum or the university’s mission as a whole. It should be noted that “selling” a program in this way is an extension of the library’s educational role on campus. In fact, it differs little from “selling” particular processes or insights to a group of students participating in an IL session. It is, after all, a matter of educating our patrons and allowing ourselves to be educated by them. In this respect, Owusu-Ansah (2005) contended that “[l]ibrarians [...] must accept formally their teaching role and actively engage in it,” especially if they expect to cultivate a legitimate role as such primary actors on the educational stage.

Librarians, then, must view faculty as a key audience and bear in mind that constant personalization and refinement of their services would indeed generate interest and participation (Julien and Given, 2002/2003, p. 83). One way to approach this relationship, as Badke (2005) added, is to not enter it as if we are “wheedling our way into the good graces of faculty in order to make a pitch [...] from a position of weakness,” nor should we take on the role of a self-righteous crusader, as some would wish to do (pp. 68-69). Instead, it is best to pursue a measured line that allows each group to be professionals and “masters of their own realms” while also recognizing that these realms overlap and diverge in ways which create unique opportunities to address a range of specific learning outcomes and reinforce the idea that students should be well-rounded, lifelong learners (Julien and Given, 2002/2003, p. 83). Thus while librarians “master” their own domain and respect that of others, they should, as Grassian and Kaplowitz (2005) contend, involve themselves in “curriculum planning and proposals” while “maintain[ing] a continuous environmental scan for new trends” (p. 226). Such an approach not only grants librarians needed insight into the working lives of their partners, it also allows them to better tailor and market their own services in such a way that they fit into the arrangement in an unforced, organic fashion. Librarians, then, while keeping their own identity as professionals, must remain cognizant of their role as cross-cultural negotiators.

It is necessary to understand, however, that these problems cannot be combated without genuine empathy, diligence, and

evidence of a solid service record on the part of librarians. Tom Glynn and Connie Wu (2003) pointed out this certainty:

Gaining the trust of faculty as their professional peers may take years of effort, and requires demonstrating our subject expertise and information retrieval skills, taking a personal interest in their scholarly endeavors, as well as sound communication skills (p. 123).

Badke (2005) also asserted that the “task of bringing real information literacy to campus is a thing of much work and small victories,” but there is no doubt that the effort would prove meaningful if approached in a judicious and enthusiastic manner. Organizational initiatives such as the ALA’s *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (ACRL 2000) certainly provide some of the justifications and frameworks necessary to help ease the burden of proof placed on the library and aid in its negotiations, but unless local situations are addressed, as the ALA itself noted in the document, and actual personal relationships are built on mutual respect and trust, standards will have little meaning. Even the well-intentioned move to bring credit-bearing IL courses into specific disciplines, as Badke (2005) and others advocate, would prove disappointing if the hearts-and-minds approach to promoting and practicing IL is forsaken (p. 74). Such required courses quickly become “jokes” or nuisances if they lack support from members of the teaching faculty who, after all, enjoy the most one-on-one contact time with the students whom we aim to influence and ultimately educate. As Bruce (2002) observed, “changes in educational cultures cannot be mandated.” Changes must be negotiated through a variety of functional “partnerships,” which include: “policy partnerships, research partnerships, curriculum partnerships, higher degree partnerships, and academic development partnerships” (Bruce, 2001, p. 108). Librarians may succeed in each of these areas if they are willing to move beyond the relative safety of the library to meet the needs and alter the perceptions of their partners and patrons.

COLLABORATIVE SOLUTIONS

What channels exist, then, for promoting and fostering IL in humanities? If we once again consider our graduate student in English as a model, we would discover some definite inroads of value to librarians seeking to establish partnerships with humanities scholars. Kay Johnson and Elaine Magusin (2005) acknowledged that graduate students who teach or tutor, as well as part-time and junior faculty, are the ones primarily responsible for undergraduate education, especially at the freshman and sophomore levels, and thus represent a viable resource for outreach efforts (p. 16). While it is true that at present most academic libraries offer some species of IL training as an orientation or brief unit tied to first year composition classes, we cannot always count these forays into the

curriculum of the humanities as successful ventures befitting uncritical replication semester after semester. With varying results that seem much dependent upon the relationship between instructional librarians and teaching faculty, such IL offerings can no doubt provide a firm first step towards establishing a more developed IL program, but they should by no means be considered the end of IL endeavors. Working with possibly less established but more flexible humanities scholars and establishing more intensive, long-term goals that cover more than a single freshman composition class would also help librarians meet this ongoing shift in academic culture.

Because humanists engage predominantly “Generation Y” students who already have an existing knowledge base when it comes to utilizing the Internet and various software programs, we have a potentially receptive group that might happily accept the new ideas and methods we advocate (Forbes, 2007, p. 225). This dynamic affords opportunities for instructional librarians to form alliances and can free them from formulaic lessons so that they may explore particular questions related to the courses they are supporting. However, we should also remember that these humanists frequently find it difficult to give up class time for IL sessions or are only willing to send their class to them if they can be exempted from attendance and thereby acquire some free time (Forbes, 2007, p. 226). Such a regrettable state is of course due in large part to the issues of awareness and promotion discussed earlier, chiefly as they apply to this busy group who may remain unmoved by the vaguely understood promise of IL and simply do not want to bother with something that seems so rudimentary from a distance. Since the perception of arbitrariness has not been replaced with one of meaningful applicability and collaborative support, simply requiring attendance or attaching points or credit to these sessions as a means of control does little to alter any unfavorable attitudes towards them. In fact, such an approach makes them appear to be little more than proverbial “hoops” students must “jump through” to get on with life.

It must be also be said that as useful as this type of connection may be, simply finding broad points of relation with humanists would not suffice unless IL sessions appear authentic to humanists. Although there is a definite need to communicate with this group in order to educate them or simply keep them abreast of new information as Glynn and Wu (2003) rightly point out, true partnerships cannot occur through mere phone calls, emails, and general announcements (p. 123, p. 126). Cultivating real, intensive “partnerships” of the variety that Bruce (2001; 2002) discusses involves a direct and sustained connection with this group.

Fortunately, librarians have encouraging options for connecting with this group. As Elmborg (2003) showed, a perhaps little known but nonetheless pertinent point of relation does exist between writing instruction and IL programs: writing

instruction programs initially struggled to gain understanding, acceptance, and a place of perceived legitimacy within the overall scheme of the English discipline until recently, which indicates that many of the growing pains which IL continues to work through are not without a clear precedent, both in terms of institutional perception and the focus on teaching an essential but often overlooked and undervalued process (pp. 68-69). Drawing on history, then, may give librarians a useful means to establish the dialog necessary to better relations and institute relevant IL sessions. Given this parallel, it is reasonable to believe that many faculty members, especially those involved with composition and rhetoric, would understand the essence of IL’s plight, but they cannot begin to find solidarity with instructional librarians, nor can they comprehend the collaborative development of IL as a whole, unless librarians are willing to educate them in detail on these matters. Whether discussing these issues with them during liaison activities, departmental forums, or over a reasonably priced cup of coffee, librarians must seek out opportunities to connect with such colleagues.

Forbes (2007), Glynn and Wu (2003), and Johnson and Magusin (2007) argued that it is imperative to personally invest ourselves in this ongoing collaborative process, going so far as to even team teach, in order to ensure the success of students (p. 226; p. 125; p. 39). On a practical level, team teaching ensures that the needs of teaching faculty and librarians are written into the program, which serves to make IL an integral rather than isolated component of learning. Coupling IL services with the university’s writing center, for example, could also open up collaborative opportunities with the humanities while addressing the particular needs of students (Jacobson, 2001). By partnering with the writing center, librarians may help train tutors, many of whom may be graduate students, establish IL sessions and related reference appointments, or even maintain office hours to offer IL-specific tutorials. Given that many writing programs schedule visits to the writing center and even require students to participate in tutorials, librarians could volunteer to offer services as part of these visits, introducing and subsequently building upon components of their coursework.

Along the way, we may encounter our graduate student in the middle of an undergraduate tutorial emphasizing research, thus allowing us to re-establish contact and assist with the development of IL in both a graduate and undergraduate context. Lastly, team teaching and direct contact with teaching centers undoubtedly grants specificity and immediate applicability to the lessons, which allows librarians to satisfy participants while further recommending the library’s role as an established research partner rather than as a desperate last resort for woe-begotten students. Alexandria Peary and Linda Ernack (2004) provided a pertinent model of this type of collaboration in the context of a Composition and Rhetoric class where the professor and librarian worked together to

reinforce and expand upon their respective lessons rather than reacting to one another on an ad hoc basis. Such an investment in particular programs and specific courses by librarians helps establish clear lines of communication and effective, proactive pedagogical practices.

CAMPUS-WIDE INVOLVEMENT

Elmborg (2003) and Forbes (2007) have argued that a productive way to transition into this deep collaborative presence with the humanities is through Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC). WAC, as a truly cross-disciplinary affair, encourages librarians and faculty to establish lines of communication regarding the role of literacy on campus. However, it also allows professionals to air the assumptions and methods which drive their scholarship and teaching. Articulating these ideas may cause them to recognize how little others know of their work, as well as prompt them to critically reflect on their own practices in the face of new ones (Elmborg, 2003, p. 77). WAC, as a whole, posits that literacy is a campus-wide affair, not only the work of the English department and our graduate student. At the least, as Elmborg (2003) contended, as a collaborative “model” WAC can teach IL “a great deal about being successful in working in the disciplines” and may indeed prove to be a strong “partner” for librarians (p. 69). In a real sense, library community’s view of IL fits nicely into the goals of WAC and WAC brings with it many theoretical and practical aspects which can add value to IL initiatives. Fortunately, many universities have some version of WAC already in place, which allows us to fit our expertise into an existing framework or at least study working models.

Grassian and Kaplowitz’s (2005) conclusion that librarians should actively involve themselves in curricular decisions makes sense because the practice enables them to pursue collaboration from an informed insider’s position (p. 226). As a matter of course, librarian involvement in WAC meets this goal and helps reduce the chance of poorly constructed assignments which cannot be supported by the library from occurring on a frequent basis since it makes provisions for continuous dialog, thereby allowing the library to keep faculty abreast of current and future offerings and trends (Johnson and Magusin, 2007, pp. 44-46). Perhaps such a move would also lessen some of the frustration and blame that Julien and Given’s (2002/2003) librarians exhibited in the BI-L [ILL] listserv. Even though a few humanities scholars might still exhibit scepticism and resistance after librarians have made headway with the majority of their peers, some of these scholars, especially those involved in the research and writing intensive disciplines of English, Journalism and History, would likely come to appreciate this considered and dedicated approach to literacy if they were exposed to it on a consistent basis. For them, IL would appear to be less of a superfluous hanger-on

than a valued companion who helps to ensure better student work and fewer headaches for them.

Whether or not we involve ourselves in WAC or similar programs, it is evident that the effectiveness of our IL services remains contingent upon an authentic and continually renewed investment in understanding the IB of humanists within specific disciplinary contexts. Timeliness in this effort is also critical, especially when we consider the increasingly hybridized and complex nature of scholarship and pedagogy within the humanities. Ignoring or passively witnessing the many disciplinary changes that affect our stake in IL impedes our ability to enter into a meaningful conversation with humanities scholars. In fact, for those librarians still clinging to the generalization of the cranky, technophobic English professor, the transition into this engagement may be difficult indeed. Ultimately, however, librarians can enjoy meaningful dialog with humanists once the humanists begin to recognize that their needs can be shared and even realized by those librarians who once seemed content to inhabit minor roles in the larger bid for literacy. We would do well to consider this approach as we bring IL center stage and strive to reach the hearts and minds of our patrons—our collaborators.

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