

What Do I Do Now? Helping Librarians Develop Teaching Skills
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1. Introduction and Background – Carrie Kruse

Because of the introduction in 1996 of a campus communications requirement that involved an information literacy component, the instruction program grew considerably, the need to expand the pool of staff available (and willing) to teach was critical. In 1998, the UW-Madison Library Instruction Program formed a working group to address the need for helping teaching librarians develop new teaching skills and/or strengthen existing ones.

The group's charge was to:

- identify some components of the teaching repertoire that campus librarians would like help developing or strengthening
- recommend ways we might address those needs

The working group was made up of people from a variety of instruction situations: "old" teaching librarians, "new" teaching librarians, staff who volunteered to teach outside of their regular positions, a librarian from School of Education, JoAnn Carr, library staff from small libraries, etc.

We started with some needs assessment. A questionnaire was sent to all library instruction teaching staff. From 66 returned forms, we gathered information about how much interest there was in different approaches to improving teaching. The ideas included: attending workshops on teaching techniques, receiving articles, meeting with colleagues for discussion, having a video taken on teaching for viewing/assessing teaching style, participating with peer coaching, using an evaluation form in classes.

We also asked for feedback on areas that people wanted additional training: dealing with anxiety, teaching techniques, peer coaching, managing classroom technology, developing rapport with students, developing rapport with course instructors.

The results of the questionnaire gave us good information to move forward.

A second type of needs assessment form was drawn up for use at the larger libraries, so that coordinators could find out more individual preferences and needs of their teaching staff. Both needs assessment forms were developed with the idea that they could be re-used, given that new instruction staff would be hired in the future.

The committee also looked at potentially useful resources.

We looked at available handouts (instruction related acronyms, short articles on teaching skills, a list of instruction-related Web sites, sample evaluation forms, librarians who don't mind having their classes observed, a list of library staff who agree to be resources for expertise in a variety of areas: technical, database/resource, subject background).

There was some interest in developing a mentor program for new teaching librarians, as well as pursuing a peer-coaching program. We already have some staff discussion and networking opportunities in place on our campus: brownbag discussions and an annual BI Retreat. We

have subsequently focused on peer coaching as a discussion topic, and brought in a speaker on coaching for a retreat workshop.

We also explored currently available teaching skills videos through the School of Education Library – dividing up among the committee members the task of viewing a number of titles that seemed promising from catalog searches. These videos, that are a more general approach to teaching skills, didn't really suit the needs of the one-shot lecture, or other similar situations unique to library instruction. So one recommendation from the committee was to create our own video that could address the specific needs of library instruction and the skills needed for such instruction scenarios. The questionnaire results showed that there was a clear discomfort with the idea of videotaping oneself teaching for assessment.

So, following the committee's report of the identification of the types of things the teaching librarians wanted help with, we recommended that a new committee be formed to tackle the creation of the video.

2. Video planning – Helene Androski

The goal of this new BI Video Committee was, again, to help librarians to be more comfortable in their teaching role, bearing in mind few of us had any formal training in teaching or any expectation when we began our careers that we would be teaching. To this end, we made the following decisions up front:

- We wanted, most importantly, that this video be *watchable* with high production values, so we decided we should hire a professional producer rather than make a "home movie." (However, we would write the script and remain involved in the filmmaking throughout, since we understood what the content should be). Fortunately we have a School of Education on campus with an Instructional Media Development Center, so finding a professional producer was not difficult.
- We would use actual librarians rather than actors so our audience could identify with the characters and situations on the screen. Also we did not want to rely on a "lay person's" perception of how a librarian looked and behaved. We would aim for diversity not only with the librarians but also with the students used in filming. However we would use a professional actor to narrate, since an untrained voice could get annoying.
- We would use humor to keep it interesting and NOT preachy. Our inspiration was the series of staff training films done by John Cleese.
- We would use a variety of sites in campus libraries to reflect different instruction situations (classrooms, computer labs, seminar rooms) and, again, give viewers something to identify with.
- We would focus on concrete teaching tips rather than pedagogical theory. We wanted this to be useful!
- We would make it generic enough so that it would not be obsolete immediately (for example, not show how to teach a particular database) and so that it could be used outside of our campus. The many ways to obtain a copy of this video are listed at the end of this paper.

A word about the funding issues raised by our decision to go with a professional producer:

- We worked up a rough script and met with the producer to get a cost estimate. He was able to determine how much actual shooting time - at \$115/hour - plus how much post production work - editing, etc - would be needed based on the information we gave him. The estimate came to about \$7500.
- We gave this estimate to our Library Instruction Coordinator, Abbie Loomis, and she set about finding the money. Since she was armed with the original needs survey and our detailed cost estimate, she was able to get the library director, Ken Frazier, to fund the project. So doing our homework helped, but there is also no discounting the goodwill of your administrators.

3. Script/ Filming/ Premiering – Dineen Grow

When we actually sat down to write the rough draft of the script that we eventually submitted for the estimate, we kept in our minds the goals that Helene talked (watchability, high production, etc).

The first major decision was how to present the material in a way that would have the most impact. We decided to have the script broken up into sections, each highlighting one of the major points we wanted to make. We called them our 'teaching tips' and we eventually wound up with six tips. They are: 1) Preparation, 2) Building Rapport, 3) Getting students ready to learn, 4) Tips for presenting materials, 5) Keeping student's attention, 6) Using Interactive techniques.

Working individually or in pairs, committee members took different sections and wrote the text for their assigned section. These were submitted to the group for comment. I then took the rough draft of each section and all of the comments and tried to fit it into a 'story line' and to give it more of a solo voice feel.

The committee again reviewed the script and made some editorial changes. The next step was to rework the script into a film ready document. This meant having to re-arrange the script in a couple of ways to accommodate different needs. For instance, we had to make sure that we had ideas for what action should be taking place while the voice over was happening. We didn't want too much text and not enough visual or vice versa.

We also did a version where we pulled out all the scenes that were to occur in one location, so that we could make sure we didn't have to have the film crew moving all over campus, unnecessarily. The last reworking involved pulling everything that a particular actor was going to have to do. Each of our volunteer actors was given a copy of this ahead of time so that knew what we were expecting them to do. Since expense and people's time were considerations, we wanted to streamline and be as organized as possible!

Doing this type of prep work ourselves really saved us money. Had we just handed the film producers a rough, narrative script, the final project would have been very expensive. Breaking every shot down scene by scene also helped us get an idea of where we had holes either in the action or in the text and we were able to adjust accordingly,

The next step was to contact the film crew and start coordinating schedules. We needed to make sure that we had the right number of student assistants on hand, the proper room reserved, the actor in place, and the film crew all showing up in the same place. This was probably the hardest part of the entire project.

Some of the side projects involved with this were a couple of field trips to local costume outlets. I won't spoil the surprise, but I'll just say that some of the invoices that we were submitting raised a few eyebrows!

During the actual filming, there was a lot of give and take between library staff and the producers. We improvised a lot with scenes, while still keeping true to the original intent of the script. It was a great collaborative effort. But, I never knew from one shoot to the next what might get changed. Certainly, the other committee members didn't have a chance to know what we were up to for many of the shoots. So, it was great that we had a chance to actually sit in the editing room with them and go through the film, which they had digitized, scene by scene and help make the changes we thought necessary.

Once the film was ready to roll, we had a lot of fun with the promotion. We held a grand premiere complete with awards and speeches. You'll see the original announcement that was sent to our teaching staff inviting them to the viewing on your handout. The whole idea was to have fun with the film while, at the same time, trying to give our staff some real basic, concrete tips on how to approach their own teaching sessions.

To view this video, go to:

- LOEX (for loan to LOEX members): <http://www.emich.edu/public/loex/loex.html>
- Streamed version: <http://www.library.wisc.edu/libraries/Instruction/video.htm>
- UW-Madison Library Instruction Office (for loan to Wisconsin librarians): (608) 262-4308 or libinstruct@library.wisc.edu