

Higher Ed Collaboration: The Key to a Successful Partnership

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The academic librarian wears many hats during the course of a day. We work with students, faculty, and staff to fulfill information needs, make purchasing decisions for collection development, conduct research, and sometimes even fix a paper jam disrupting the “flow of life” in the computer lab. Each work day finds academic librarians experiencing new and interesting opportunities for teaching, research, and interaction. While our job responsibilities are diverse, these activities have one thing in common - the goal for each is **collaboration**.

Collaboration is a joint effort between groups with a common goal. In the academic setting, the common goal shared by the library and academic faculty is the education of our students and the development of lifelong learners. Beyond that common goal, we have individual goals; librarians want students to develop the knowledge to find, locate, use, and evaluate information (Big6!). Our teaching faculty wants students to gain knowledge within a specific discipline.

I remember once attending an all-faculty meeting, and before the meeting started a faculty member asked me a research question. I told her I would stop by her office to explain the specific databases that would help in the research process and brainstorm some specific keywords. Her response – “You’d do that?” – illustrated for me that not everyone understands the collaborative efforts that are a normal part of the job for librarians. In some ways we need to act like salespeople - “selling” our knowledge and expertise to show faculty that with our help, students will learn more efficiently and develop essential skills.

Approaching faculty in other departments or disciplines to establish an information literacy program is much like a science experiment. Every experiment tests a hypothesis, but due to unexpected variables, the experiment may not turn out exactly as you had planned. Working with faculty to design, implement, instruct, and assess information literacy programs (ACRL, 2003) is an exciting experiment in educating students. Successful implementation of information literacy into the curriculum is dependent on a working and active atmosphere between teaching faculty, administration, instruction librarians, and other information professionals.

Practical Steps Toward Collaboration

Once you have established a working relationship with teaching faculty, you must decide what will be the best approach for collaboration. The Big6 offers an invaluable roadmap for integrating information literacy skills into the subject-area curriculum. All academic assignments require that students recognize the need for information and the ability to locate, access, use, synthesize, and evaluate information. Big6 provides a structure that allows you to integrate any number of information literacy skills - for instance, do you want students to learn how to better use databases to meet their information needs? Focus on Big6 #2 and 3, Information Seeking Strategies and Location and Access.

Furthermore, Big6 offers a logical way to explain information literacy skills development to the faculty member with whom you are collaborating. One way to approach this is to ask the instructor for a copy of the collaboration assignment in advance. You can then come to the meeting with a “map” of how the assignment corresponds to the stages in the Big6. This will help the instructor visualize how the

collaboration might work, and will also show the systematic way Big6 can help students develop valuable information literacy skills.

Currently, four of the members of our library staff are working with two members of English Department faculty to integrate information literacy into the core composition classes. All students must complete these classes, so it makes for an ideal arena for information literacy skill integration. When identifying possible points of collaboration, one suggestion is to look for classes that the majority of students on the campus are required to take, such as English Composition.

To begin the process, the librarians held a planning meeting. At this meeting, we outlined goals and possible outcomes for integrating information literacy into the curriculum. We even went so far as to have a possible integration methodology planned for actual classes. We realized that many faculty illustrate the concepts of information literacy in their teaching practice, but may not realize it due to lack of formal training or knowledge of jargon and terminology. To better connect with the faculty as to our thoughts, we provided copies of the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education*, which is an excellent tool to guide the process of integration. But, we'll explore integration in a follow-up column. Back to collaboration.

The Big6 is the best means for illustrating the collaborative effort of librarians and faculty. Developing lectures on identifying keywords and synonyms for a search query are a great illustration of Task Definition. Using the online card catalog and databases to locate research on the topic are great for Location and Access, determination of specific databases to best meet the needs of the subject are illustrative of Information Seeking Strategies. Using concept maps to combine information from a variety of resources is a good assignment for Synthesis of Information. The list will go on as we develop more grounded ideas and collaborative assignments.

Ru's Steps to Collaboration with Faculty

1. Discuss the idea with your department chair or dean to determine their thoughts on the process. It may be politically appropriate to consult the administrative department that oversees all curriculum matters for your institution.
2. Identify librarians within your building or unit to work with you on the entire process, and determine their level of interest.
3. Review existing research on the topic.
4. Conduct a planning meeting with interested librarians to determine possible collaborative faculty or disciplines, outlining potential goals, outcomes and methodology.
5. Communicate with identified faculty and/or disciplines to determine interest.
6. Conduct a brainstorming session or sessions with interested teaching faculty to elucidate information literacy theory and its role in education, outline ideas, suggest possible integration points, illustrate standards and outcomes, and other thoughts as they arise.
7. Tie the [Association of College and Research Libraries Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education](#) (ACRL, 2000) with any existing subject-specific or individual institutional standards, goals, or learning outcomes as a means to clarify ideas from the planning sessions.
8. Align curriculum, outcomes, and standards, and so forth with the Big6 stages.
9. As the process continues, determine specifics of the program, including lecture topics, number of sessions, teaching responsibilities, assignments, learning outcomes and goals, and assessment.
10. Practice scholarship and continue the collaborative nature through the publication of journal articles or conference presentations outlining your experiences.
11. At all times, keep the lines of communication open between librarians, teaching faculty, library and college administration.
12. Revise, Redo, Reinvent, And Celebrate!

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