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Originate, Create, Renovate, and Innovate: Leading Revolution in the Academic Library

Instructor Development: A Model for Growth and Success

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Abstract

An Instructor Development Programming Task Force was appointed at the University of Kansas (KU) Libraries in the summer of 2010. The group was charged with investigating existing models of professional development programs for instruction librarians at other university libraries, as well as recommending a model for implementation at KU. A recommended model needed to provide opportunities for discussion of new trends, theories, and methods in instruction, as well as information literacy standards and concepts. The Task Force designed and administered a survey for all library faculty and staff who teach in order to gather feedback that could be used to design useful and focused professional development opportunities. In addition, Task Force members reviewed other professional development programming models in vogue at research universities across the country to learn about other aspects of program development that could be considered within the KU context. Discussion within the Task Force also focused on the structure of the model itself. While such discussions were informed by survey results and consideration of other models, Task Force members were aware of the greater emphasis placed on the assessment of instruction in current higher education environments. The purpose of this paper is to provide reflections about the work of the Instructional Development Programming Task Force as it worked to develop a model specifically focused on the needs of instruction librarians, informed by results of an in-house survey, review of other models, and consideration of current trends.

Many of the University of Kansas (KU) Librarians and instructional staff have long served as teachers in support of numerous academic disciplines across the university. Significant efforts within the Libraries have been made through the years to develop instructional support mechanisms and learning opportunities designed to enhance the abilities of those engaged in these instructional roles. Toward that end, the *Instructor Development Programming Task Force* was appointed at the University of Kansas (KU) Libraries in the summer of 2010, with the following members: Erin Ellis, Chair, Head of Instructional Services, Tami Albin, Undergraduate Instruction & Outreach Librarian, Mary Raple, Program Assistant in International Area Studies, and John Stratton, Business and Economics Librarian. The Task Force was given these two charges:

Overall Charge:

The ILWG Instructor Development Programming Task Force will investigate existing models of professional development programs (or similar learning communities) for instruction librarians and recommend a model for implementation at KU Libraries. The model should provide opportunities for instructors to investigate new trends, theories, and methods in library instruction, information literacy, and higher education, and incorporate readings, speakers, programs, and/or services for the education and development of library instructors and for broader development of the KU Libraries Instructional Services program. Additionally, the model will provide for training opportunities, including orientation, for librarians in instructional design and technology integration to support pedagogy. The task force should consult the ACRL Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians throughout the course of their work (<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/profstandards.cfm>).

Specific Charge for 10-11:

The ILWG Professional Development Task Force will develop and recommend a structure for an immersive faculty development series/seminar for teaching librarians and library staff. This structure could be loosely based on the current Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) model, or based on other models uncovered by the task force. This series/seminar should be developed for both small and large groups, and should provide a skeletal curriculum based on pedagogy, assessment, and instructional methods and technologies in library instruction.

Thus, the Task Force was generally charged with investigating existing models of professional development programs for instruction librarians at other university libraries, as well as recommending a model for implementation at KU. The Task Force has the ultimate goal of enhancing instruction-related training and development opportunities and will incorporate current or planned assessment strategies into the final model that is adopted. Finally, the Task Force was also fully mindful that any recommended model should afford opportunities for discussion of new trends, theories, and methods in instruction, as well as information literacy standards and concepts. The purpose of this paper is to provide reflections about the work of the Instructional Development Programming Task Force as it worked to develop a model specifically focused on the needs of instruction librarians, informed by results of an in-house survey, review of other models, and consideration of current trends.

As the Task Force began its work, members first pondered background information relevant to its work. For example, the KU Libraries recently formulated and prioritized strategic directions to guide operations over the next two to three years, augmented by an internal plan with specific goals and objectives intended to guide these operations. Among the more cogent points addressed in the internal plan, instructional services was called to:

- Oversee the “professional development and support for librarians and staff actively engaged in instructional activities;”
- Charged with “reactivating a peer observation program;” and
- To “expand instructional efforts at the 200-300 course levels.”

This is not to say that there have not been previous efforts aimed at enhancing the training and experiences of those engaged in teaching. In fact, over the last several years, Kansas State University Libraries and KU Libraries have worked in partnership to bring professional speakers and presenters to Kansas to provide workshops centered round information literacy concepts and practices. For example, from 2006 through this year, presenters have come to KU and given valuable workshops focusing on various information literacy themes. Recent offerings have included sessions about the development and application of learning outcomes (Debra Gilcrist, 2010), “studying” the student as library user (Susan Gibbons, 2009), and assessment of student learning (Gabriella Sonntag, 2008). After each workshop, it has been a normal practice on each campus to develop other programming centered on the specific theme offered that particular year. In addition to these approaches, other programmatic offerings related to instructional development have been offered over the past several years. The distinguishing characteristic at this juncture is that KU Libraries is focusing on creating a sustainable model for framing future programming activities and events.

In addition to their awareness of recent related activities, Task Force members reviewed other professional development programming models in vogue at research universities across the country to learn about programs that may be apply to the tasks at hand. For example, Task Force members each examined models in place at Washington State University, University of Texas at Austin, University of California, Berkeley, and the University of Michigan. While each institution approaches programming for instructor development based on their own particular institutional circumstances, common aspects shared by all include an overarching goal of improving and enhancing the teaching done by practitioners, applying thematic topics on a regular (i.e., semester or annual) basis, and employing a variety of methods to reach participants in their respective programs (including forums, workshops, discussions, and other events). The KU Task Force noted these common elements to inform their discussions about the aspects that the local model should potentially embody.

In addition, the Task Force reviewed the information promulgated by the KU Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) as a way to inform our efforts to improve library-related instruction. In particular, the Task Force took note of the mission of the CTE and how it reflects the aspirations of the proposed instructor development model within the libraries. For example, the CTE:

- *Facilitates meetings* with small groups of faculty members to find time-efficient and effective ways to improve student learning;
- *Assists faculty* with representing the intellectual work they do in teaching;
- *Hosts workshops, conferences, and discussion forums* on teaching and learning in higher education; and
- Have staff to *meet individually with faculty and instructional staff* who want to discuss any facet of teaching and student learning. (Note: Italics are the authors' emphasis.)

These particular aspects of CTE's work reflect the very similar goals of the Task Force, especially with a focus on facilitated meetings, workshops, and discussions all designed to help enhance and develop instructors and their in-class activities.

Besides the evaluation of other instructional models and programs at other universities, and consideration of the KU CTE mission, the Task Force designed and administered a survey for all instructional library faculty and staff in order to gather feedback that could be used to design professional development opportunities. All in all, 22 instructional faculty and staff participated in the survey, which was comprised of four sections:

- *Introduction to the survey* (information about the survey itself)
- *About You and the Instructional Space* (five questions, covering such topics as where teaching actually occurs (in or outside the libraries), equipment/technology used in teaching, and promotion of instructional services);

- *Design and Instruction* (12 questions, covering such topics as types of instructional material designed and used, use of ACRL literacy standards, review of syllabi, confidence in presentation styles and techniques, collaboration with faculty, and adapting teaching styles to accommodate various learning styles); and
- *Evaluating Teaching and Learning* (five questions, including those about frequency of collecting student assessment data, measuring student learning, methods to determine teaching effectiveness, and whether instructors achieved teaching goals).

After the survey results were analyzed, the Task Force grouped the responses into various parts: For example, responses indicated that instructional staff communicate with faculty largely through email (as opposed to other ways) while planning instructional sessions; most instructors use web-based LibGuides and printed handouts as teaching aids in the classroom; and pre-review of syllabi and research assignments is a common practice prior to teaching a library instruction session. While most respondents expressed high levels of confidence in their presentation styles and in their ability to design effective learning experiences for students, the survey revealed that few instructors actually conduct formal learning assessments following class, relying instead on verbal feedback as a basis for judgment about their overall effectiveness. Most also expressed the belief that even in the absence of this data, classroom teaching activities were effective at achieving instructional goals. (Note: for graphical presentation of some of this information, please note the link to the PowerPoint presentation in the "Notes" section below). As the results were being reviewed, the Task Force was aware that the special charge called for greater emphasis on assessment. The survey showed, however, that the lack of formal assessment done by instructional staff is thus a significant challenge that merits more in-depth discussion within the KU Libraries.

After the survey analysis was completed, the Task Force had this data on hand to aid in its deliberations, along with information about other institutional models and the mission of the KU CTE, discussed above. At this juncture, the Task Force began to focus on the structure of the KU model itself. At the same time, Task Force members were aware of the significant emphasis being placed on the assessment of instruction in institutions of higher learning. Based on the information it had assembled, the Task Force developed a working outline of the structure and components of a potential instructor programming development model. It was decided, for example, that structure of the model would be built around an annual series of events, all centered on a yearly theme. Programming components could be varied depending on need, and could potentially be offered as workshops, discussions, or other pertinent events, all to be overseen by a small planning group under the auspices of KU Libraries Instructional Services. Within the structure of the model, four topical components would be organized as tracks in which to place important developmental content for instructional staff. These components are as follows:

Practical Applications: This component would be focused on training sessions such as effective usage of instructional lab/classroom equipment and software (such as the *SmartBoard* and *SynchronEyes* software); how to customize LibGuides for more effective teaching and content delivery; and using the instructional calendaring systems as efficaciously as possible.

Theoretical Foundations: The Theoretical Foundations component refers to opportunities to learn about student learning theories (such as Behaviorism, Cognitivism, or Constructivism, for example); the scholarship of teaching and learning; other events under this component will include readings and forums lead by higher education experts.

Outreach and Marketing: This component focuses on best practices in reaching faculty and in negotiating strategic partnerships; using social media and other methods of communication beyond email; and how to tell the library story or sell a particular skill or expertise to important constituencies within the university.

Higher Education: Issues within this component include consideration of how libraries contribute to the overall mission of the institution; the continual impact of technology on the various disciplines served; the changing behaviors of researchers; and the Library's educational role in the general education requirements within the institution.

As the work of the Task Force progresses, some steps have already been taken to fulfill the charges given to the Task Force, all centered on the theme of designing effective learning outcomes. For instance, this fall a workshop on “Assignment Analysis” is already planned. It will be followed by a workshop entitled “Presentation Styles and Techniques” in the spring of 2011, both designed to appeal to a broad audience of instructional faculty and staff and presented in direct response to survey data. In addition, another workshop on “Sharing and Generating Learning Outcomes” is contemplated for late spring, 2011. As has been the tradition for the past several years, another K-State/KU summer workshop exploring information literacy topics will be held in 2011. These events, and the nascent model for instructional development programming created at KU, will be evaluated on an ongoing basis.

The immediate next steps for the Task Force include the sharing of information with our colleagues; evaluating the Peer Observation program instituted this fall; solicitation of volunteers for next year’s planning group; and the development of a web site and online materials in support of the programming that is offered. There is clearly much work still to be done. It is our hope that the approaches taken to create a sustainable model represent a successful effort toward supporting motivated and highly prepared instructional staff working in concert with other campus instructors to meet the educational mission of the University of Kansas.

References

Association of College and Research Libraries. Standards for Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators. [Approved by the ACRL Board, June 24, 2007]
(<http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/profstandards.cfm>).

Links to those instructional models reviewed by the Task Force include the following:

Washington State University (<http://www.wsulibs.wsu.edu/usered/update/index.htm>)

University of Texas at Austin (<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/teachindex.html>), University of California, Berkeley (<http://sunsite3.berkeley.edu/wikis/dmsis/index.php?n=Site.IDP>) University of Michigan (<http://www.lib.umich.edu/instructor-college>).

University of Kansas. Center for Teaching Excellence. See <http://www.cte.ku.edu/>

For additional information about the mission of the Center, see:

<http://www.cte.ku.edu/about/index.shtml>)

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