

LibID Literature Review: **Educational Workshops in Academic Libraries**

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Literature Review:

Educational workshops have long been an important part of outreach efforts in academic libraries. Micah Vandegrift's article "Evolving in Common" argues that library workshops in college and university settings "make research more engaging and accessible" to many kinds of student populations, especially because students are "overwhelmed" by the information they face during the beginning of the research process – he believes that librarians "act as guides" for students' information needs, and that workshops help librarians professionally develop themselves, as they learn to "better serve students as ambassadors to the library" (Vandegrift, 63-65). These workshops are additionally important in disciplines that have a higher need for information literacy, such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields. "Fostering Communities of Practice Between Science Faculty and Subject Librarians" by Pamela Eddy states that the inclusion of "discipline-specific" library workshops in STEM departments will allow students who "wouldn't think they need the library" to become acquainted with strategies for stronger inquiry than they could in their classes, and which "strengthens their experience" (Eddy et. al., 394-395). A common conclusion between both Eddy and Vandegrift's articles is that library workshops are effective ways to not only teach research and critical thinking skills beyond the classroom, but to assist academic – and especially subject – librarians in establishing their presence as a part of students' support systems. It is clear that library workshops are conducive to the improvement of students' information literacy and research skills, which allows them to become better acquainted with higher education.

Something important to note is that academic libraries have been rapidly changing in recent years to meet the increasingly diverse and digital teaching and research needs of the users (students and faculty) that they serve. This includes using a wider variety of digital tools and spaces than the traditional research database to communicate the continued relevance of the library in higher education settings. Hannah Gascho-Rempel and Paul McMillan's "Using Learning Management Systems' Discussion Boards to Engage Students in Online Library Workshops" provides an interesting snapshot into the early development of online workshops and how they can build skills in students. They discuss a need for academic libraries to "maintain a workshop atmosphere in the new medium," and argue for the usage of learning management systems (LMS) in library outreach materials due to their growing status as an "essential part of university learning," doing so using their experience as research librarians at Oregon State University (Gascho-Rempel/McMillan, 364). The adoption of LMS software at OSU is noted as something that "is more successful than auditory tutorials alone," as the LMS allows for visual and written communication that increases accessibility to a wider variety of learning styles and allows students to practice more diverse forms of literacy (Gascho-Rempel/McMillan, 366). It

also is more collaborative than a traditional academic approach, as LMS systems offer opportunities for peer-to-peer work and discussion through online, school-monitored message boards. The adoption of LMS systems is important for academic libraries, and higher education as a whole, because of these systems' reliance on an engaged population of students to be successful.

Going forward in time, Nancy Shin's "Academic Library Instruction and Outreach in a Pandemic" similarly advocates for the usage of LMS systems in academic libraries, especially in contemporary academia after the COVID-19 pandemic, which relies even more heavily on digital instruction and literacy than academia at the time of the previous article (from 2008) was, due to higher education's higher dependence on online programs. Shin states that "the shift from classrooms to online learning significantly changed the role of the academic library" from "promoters to enablers" of digital literacy (Shin et. al., 4-5). Shin interviewed a wide range of academic librarians across R1 (top-tier research) universities across the U.S. and came to the conclusion that online library services are the best way to support students' research and professional development within and beyond the classroom, especially in hybrid learning settings which have become more and more common in universities. An interesting continuity over time comes from the consistent usage of LMS systems to help students take advocacy for their learning outside of school settings, as both articles state that LMS systems provide an alternative to in-person learning that is both flexible and well-known among student populations. Academic libraries have started to default to using LMS systems such as Canvas and Blackboard instructional purposes, and after reading these two sources, I believe that they are among the strongest methods of delivery for academic support programs beyond simply presenting in a class.

By far one of the most interesting articles I found was one that stated that workshops and outreach efforts do not even have to be in traditional library settings to be successful, as University of Limerick (Ireland) archivist Kristen Mulrennan's "Lessons in Making the Unique Ubiquitous" shows. This article discusses efforts from the 1990s to the COVID-19 pandemic in increasing the public presence of the university's Archives and Special Collections department, in response to – and in anticipation of – the increasingly diverse needs and interests of faculty and students affiliated with the archives. While the discourse on the value of educational workshops is very similar to what was discussed by other academic library articles, this article uniquely discusses the usage of post-workshop surveys in continuing to engage student populations after the workshops occur, as Mulrennan explains that student feedback is "essential to helping library educators understand what is done best in their work and what could need improvement" (Mulrennan, 140). While special collections within libraries have not traditionally been producing student-facing workshops, Mulrennan's article provides a unique lens through which we can understand how academic libraries outside of the typical research library can support workshops.

Ultimately, there is a very large amount of research on this subject, and I have a good understanding of the diverse approaches taken by academic libraries to support students' learning at the college level. However, there could be further exploration on the value of multi-day workshops, either in classroom or online settings. While I am aware that these programs exist, I think investigation into their success and different approaches to multi-day workshops that benefit a variety of learners. There is also room for increased assessment of educational workshops, like Mulrennan's article discusses with the usage of surveys. Assessments of the student experience through surveys, like those mentioned in her article, could examine the long-term usefulness and effectiveness of library workshops from the perspectives of the students taking them. Most of these are also not framed under a lens of participatory design or academic co-creation (collaboration with other college or university units), which has become important in contemporary library spaces. Another kind of research I think would be effective in communicating the value of educational workshops in libraries is comparing the values of each modality when developing workshops – in-person, online synchronous, or online asynchronous. Comparing and contrasting them using the perspectives of librarians, staff, and students who participated within workshops themselves could be a useful topic to research. There are various questions that comparisons can make: Are online workshops easier for students to attend and stay engaged in than in-person ones? Or is this a misconception? How can librarians and their collaborators make more responsible choices in terms of number of workshops, number of participants, and the hours required to facilitate?

Annotated Bibliography:

Eddy, Pamela, et. al. "Fostering Communities of Practice Between Science Faculty and Subject Librarians in Community Colleges." *Community College Review* 50.4 (Oct. 2022): 391-414.

While this article is outside of traditional academic writing in the fields of LIS, being from a higher education journal, this paper reports on multiple community colleges in the state of Virginia (as the researchers are from the College of William & Mary) and how research librarians provide outreach and instructional support, mainly by introducing information literacy concepts through in-class workshops, in those colleges' science departments. The study includes both interviews and observations of faculty/librarian collaboration at the community college level, and makes two conclusions: firstly, that science students' information literacy skills have improved through the presence of subject librarians, and second, that forms of outreach like workshops help students become familiar, or at least acquainted, with academic libraries and the services they provide. This article stretched my thinking on what I believed academic librarians do in higher education, as while I do love learning about science through "popular science" approaches, my only real experiences with academia and higher education – especially research – is in the humanities and some social sciences, meaning that I had almost no experience in an environment like the ones presented in the article. This article was a very valuable find because it demonstrates how academic libraries can partner with specific academic departments to increase discipline-relevant skills for its students, which is something I would hope to do as an aspiring academic librarian.

Gascho-Rempel, Hannah, and Paul McMillan. "Using Learning Management Systems' Discussion Boards to Engage Students in Online Library Workshops." *Internet Reference Services Quarterly* 13.4 (Dec. 2008): 363-380.

This is a case study of the Oregon State University Libraries' Research Workshops, which were recently developed at the time, specifically focusing on how Research & Instruction librarians at this university utilize the Blackboard learning management system (LMS) to create more interactive experiences for undergraduate and graduate students across academic disciplines participating in their workshops. One thing made abundantly clear at the beginning, through interviews with graduate students and librarians, is a need to maintain a "workshop atmosphere" despite the new medium these activities were presented in, using Blackboard's discussion boards to create a sense of community and offer audiovisual guides for navigating library databases, the latter of which appeals to a more diverse variety of learning styles than solely reading text online would. The article discusses early efforts made by academic libraries to better insert themselves into digital spaces and provide more accessible workshops, and provides some very good insight on the role that LMS systems may play in academic libraries. While reading, I was able to find many connections and parallels between my own experience in UW Libraries' GSRI workshop and the OSU workshops mentioned throughout the article, and I appreciate their usage of graduate students' perspectives.

Mulrennan, Kristen. "Lessons in Making the Unique Ubiquitous: Diversifying Special Library Collections Roles at the University of Limerick Through Teaching and Outreach." *Archives & Records* 41.2 (June 2020): 126-147.

Mulrennan's article is a very unique one because of how it discusses teaching and learning efforts within universities' special collections libraries rather than a traditional academic library setting. She describes a range of educational programs implemented through the Special Collections department at the University of Limerick's library in Ireland, which includes "building a network of longstanding [sic] academic contacts, offering research assistance, and delivering a series of workshops catered to a broad range of disciplines," and discusses how the program holds itself accountable for student success by involving students in the process of workshop development – after attending workshops, they are given the chance to respond to a survey about what went well and what could improve, and any sorts of workshops they would like to see. Personally, I thought this was a wonderful demonstration of what academic libraries are like in other parts of the world (aside from the U.S.), and I find the student-centered mindset that Mulrennan and her team possess to be very interesting and admirable, as it can inform my own eventual practice.

Shin, Nancy, et. al. "Academic Library Instruction and Outreach in a Pandemic: Lessons Learned." *Journal of Web Librarianship*, 16.1 (March 2022): 1-30.

This study examines the experiences of different academic libraries at R1 universities across the U.S. during the nationally-mandated shift from in-person to remote instruction at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The bulk of the publication features an explanation of a survey of 244 R1 academic librarians and the data collection and analysis processes from the same survey, with results indicating a "strongly positive reception" to online learning and an intention to continue having online teaching and outreach efforts beyond the pandemic's peak (this article was written in 2021), and some suggestions for library practitioners planning to continue online services, including the usage of learning management (LMS) systems to more effectively engage college-level students and the need to continue offering both synchronous and asynchronous workshops to engage multiple learning populations within universities. I think this survey and the analysis after reflected my own experience having created and facilitated online workshops for students in the pandemic, even if I only did it from an academic advising/student development perspective rather than a librarian perspective, and showed me the wide variety of adjustments and adaptations made by university librarians across the U.S. during pandemic, as well as the importance of online workshops in the retention of academic skills despite the learning loss that occurred in the shift from in-person to remote learning. I have come to understand that librarianship is a career that requires a high amount of flexibility and adaptability when it comes to unexpected events.

Vandegrift, Micah. "Evolving in Common: Developing Relationships of Support Between Graduate Students and Research Librarians." *Journal of Library Administration* 53.1 (March 2013): 63-78.

Vandegrift's publication lays out a variety of practical suggestions for librarians to establish a presence in graduate programs. He discusses approaches he found beneficial through anecdotes from his experience as working at Florida State University and observations he has seen from other library specialists that work with graduate students. His central argument is that "the role of the research librarian is evolving" to better support student projects, citing graduate students "with goals outside of the Academy" as a recently increasing population that libraries are becoming increasingly better equipped to serve through outreach and professional development services, often collaborating with professional degree programs themselves. The recent expansion of professional graduate programs at R1 institutions like FSU has significantly changed the scope of academic libraries within those institutions, as Vandegrift points out, because professional students have very different needs. I see many of LibID's goals reflected in this article after I gathered some work-specific insights at my 1:1 meeting with Robin last week, namely supporting the learning efforts of graduate students who may not "traditionally" need a library, and thought this was a good addition to my understanding of the larger array of roles that academic or research librarians may play in a contemporary academic institution.