Improving Information Literacy Programming in Community Colleges:

A Framework for Success

An Issue Paper

By

Gabriel Cardenas

Introduction

  In the fall of 2019, I had the opportunity to intern at the reference desk at Los Angeles City College: a community college located in East Hollywood, California. My first day at the desk I immediately noticed the diversity of the student body. The population of students was made up of a wide range of ages, ethnicities, and socio-economic backgrounds. The second thing I noticed was how heavily reliant the students were on the library for computer access. In the fifth week of my internship, I was tasked to teach a bibliographic instruction session to a counseling class. I didn't know what kind of counseling class it was, so I asked my supervisor. My supervisor told me it was "a class to teach students how to be students". That statement stuck with me while I was teaching this group of students. Most of them have not been afforded the opportunities four-year university students have been given regarding information literacy and access to technologies. According to the LACC website, approximately 20% of students are experiencing homelessness (Holland 2017). LACC allows students to take online classes through the LACC Online Academy and many of the courses offered on campus require students to submit their assignments online. When 1 out of every 5 students are experiencing homelessness, this technological burden falls on the college library and librarians. Through information literacy programming, these often underserved and marginalized students get the opportunity to be taught by trained library professionals how to use the resources they need to achieve their academic goals. Unfortunately, these limited instruction sessions are often only between 60 and 90 minutes in length and offered to students based on the discretion of their professor. The goal of this paper is to highlight the importance of information literacy programming (also known as bibliographic instruction or library instruction) in community colleges and provide a framework to maximize the effectiveness of these programs: emphasizing the significance of teaching methods and the

collaboration between faculty and librarians This will be achieved by analyzing previous research and studies on bibliographic instruction in community colleges and also by looking at official policies and guidelines by professional organizations on the topic.

Information Literacy Programming and Student Success

The role of the librarian as an instructor is significant because studies have shown that the more a student uses the library, the more likely they are to succeed academically. A position paper from the Academic Senate states that "research shows that student use of library services serves as a predictor of student retention in academic success" (Bowman et al. 2019). Also, Portman and Roush's study in their article *Assessing the Effects of Library Instruction* showed that library instruction increases library usage amongst community college students (Portmann and Roush 2004). By correlating what is described in the Academic Senate paper with the study done by Portman and Roush, it can be determined that bibliographic instruction does indeed lead to students performing better academically.

Information Literacy Programming Professional Policies and Guidelines

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) published the *Framework for Information Literacy* in 2015 which is a document that highlights six frames or core ideas that they believe embody the idea of information literacy as an "educational reform movement". The six frames are: authority is constructed and contextual, information creation as a process, information has value, research as inquiry, scholarship as conversation, and searching as strategic exploration. The first three frames deal with the origins of information and how information is created by people and institutions that are inherently biased and have varied agendas. The first three frames also point out that information has the power to influence and be commodified. These concepts are very important to instill into community college students to

inform them they must not always blindly believe everything they hear or read, especially if it is on the internet. Many community college students are not familiar with scholarly and peer reviewed works and for librarians to have these frames in mind while giving instruction establishes a good foundation for students doing college-level research for the first time. The final three frames characterize research as a free flowing and iterative series of actions. Often, questions lead to more questions and research is a process that requires flexibility and creativity. Students may hit both physical and mental barriers while doing research; physical barriers like the ability to access certain resources and technologies, and mental barriers like doubt and frustration. As information professionals, it is our job to break down these walls and give students the best chance at academic success. These six frames provide an excellent mindset for librarians developing information literacy programs, carefully laying out core values and principles integral to student learning (American Library Association 2015).

In 2019, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges (Academic Senate) published a position paper titled *The Role of the Library Faculty in the California Community College*. In the section titled "Core Roles and Expectations for Library Faculty" the paper explicitly states that "instruction is one of the primary roles of the community college librarian" (Bowman et al. 2019). This section highlights the importance of how only professionally trained librarians should teach library instruction and it encourages libraries to have a designated space to teach students in a formal classroom setting. For community college students, this is often their first venture into higher-education, and it is important to convey the importance of bibliographic instruction by providing them an optimal learning environment. An official document like this from a reputable organization is vital for defining roles and establishing

standards within a profession. It also associates the role of the librarian with student success: the fundamental goal for information literacy programming.

The Importance of Collaboration Between Faculty and Librarians

Research has shown that when faculty and librarians work together on a clear objective for a class's instruction session, students are more motivated, and the quality of work improves. In his study, librarian Carlos Argüelles conducted an experiment to determine the impact of an information literacy program (collaboratively designed by librarians and faculty) when it is integrated into a specific community college course. He wanted to assess the increase in student competency and determine whether the information literacy program improved learning outcomes. This program was simultaneously an instructional program and an assessment program. It was divided into four steps: pre-assessment, instruction/modelling, practice, and feedback. The first step was an online survey which students took prior to the first instruction session that asked them questions to assess their general knowledge of core concepts regarding information literacy. The second step, the instruction sessions, "were designed to both describe and illustrate the core concepts according to the learning outcomes and based on the information obtained in the pre-assessment" (Argüelles 2015). Step three put the newly acquired knowledge into practice with hands on usage of information resources. Step four, "feedback", had students provide their instructors an analysis of four types of information sources with which their information literacy competence was assessed. Through careful gathering of information from the four-step information literacy program, Argüelles was able to determine that the program was a success. The results from his study revealed that "students' evaluation and grades for this course exceeded the instructor's expectations and showed students' knowledge on topics they worked on" (Argüelles 2015). This study highlighted the significance of collaboration between

faculty and librarians regarding information literacy programming. Throughout his piece, Arguelles described the collaboration process and how meticulously designed the program was. He showed that "employing a variety of strategies to develop relationships, demonstrate competence, and enhance communication are actions librarians must take to inspire collaboration with faculty" (Argüelles 2015). This study demonstrated not only the importance of collaboration with faculty, but assessment as well: assessing not only the students, but the instructors too. Assessing students' progress during and after instruction sessions helps librarians develop more efficient methods of instruction for the future. Surveying students about the instructors can also provide an insight on how to improve sessions: benefiting both teachers and learners.

In their piece *Extending our Reach: Enhanced Library Instructions in a Community College*, Wilson and Sigal attempted to find ways to improve information literacy programming in community colleges to increase participation amongst students and faculty. The authors felt that by taking a more proactive approach to library instruction and by employing different techniques, the process can be more beneficial for all parties involved. These techniques included embedded librarianship, providing virtual library instruction online, and working more collaboratively with faculty. In their study, the authors experimented with new strategies in their information literacy programs with the introductory psychology students (Psych 150). A common research assignment for all the sections of the Psych 150 course was assigned to the students and Wilson and Sigal (with the cooperation of the instructors) were able to design an information literacy program tailored to the assignment. The librarians concentrated on "face-to-face instruction" (Wilson and Sigal 2014) with each of the classes, created online modules and tutorials on how to use library resources, embedded videos of library instruction sessions online

for those that could not attend the in-person ones, and created handouts that provided basic tips that students could reference. By doing this, attendance of library instruction sessions at their library at Catawba Valley Community College in North Carolina went from 533 students in 2012, to 1,740 students in 2013. These new strategies resulted in positive reviews from students and faculty, as well as a drastic increase in requests for information literacy instruction sessions from other departments. The study also led to the authors being able to purchase digital information literacy course modules for their library, further increasing the interest in library instruction sessions (Wilson and Sigal 2014). By directly interacting with students and faculty, the authors were able to determine how impactful their modifications to their information literacy programs were. This research can be applied to other community college libraries looking to improve their information literacy programs.

Improving the Methods of Library Instruction in Community Colleges

In a study published in *College & Research Libraries* by Small, Zakaria and El-Figuigui, the authors conducted an experiment to explore the various strategies information literacy instructors can use to maintain students' attention during library instruction sessions. They analyzed the motivational aspects of information literacy and relationship between teaching strategies, and students' desire to learn and stay focused. The study carefully documented students' "on-task" and "off-task" behaviors during the library instruction sessions and kept track of what teaching strategies (actively engaging with students, walking around the classroom, using handouts etc.) were being employed during these behaviors. On-task behaviors included taking notes, asking questions, and answering the instructor's questions. Off-task behaviors included talking, laughing, looking at one's phone, and getting out of one's chair. "Many of the off-task behaviors across all sites seemed to occur when the librarian performed repeated web

searches" (Small, Zakaria, and El-Figuigui 2004). Overusing the same motivational strategies such as giving too many of the same types of examples and asking multiple questions also resulted in a high rate of off-task behaviors. Successful strategies that kept students on-task included teachers frequently interacting with students and giving students hands-on assignments during the lesson. The various teaching strategies were categorized and student's behaviors (on-task behaviors and off-task behaviors) during the sessions were documented and correlated with the teaching strategies used at the time. Also, after each session, students were interviewed (Small, Zakaria, and El-Figuigui 2004). The study provided quantitative and qualitative data regarding what works, and what does not work during a bibliographic instruction session. Data such as this is extremely useful for librarians to model their own bibliographic instruction sessions after.

With newer methods of accessing information, community college librarians are tasked with finding innovative ways of delivering instruction to students. In 1997, the Glendale Community College was awarded two grants (the Fund for Student Success and the Fund for Instructional Improvement) to launch a three-year information literacy initiative. The desire to implement this initiative was a result of interactions with students at the reference desk and the realization that many of them were extremely unfamiliar with library resources and how to access and use them. In the first year of the initiative (1998), Glendale Community College added two new two-unit courses to their catalog: Library 191 (Introduction to Information Competency) and Library 101 (Intermediate Information Competency). The following year, (using the grant funds) six workshops were created and taught by both full-time and part-time faculty. These workshops were offered every week and covered the topics of citation sources, statistical and government sources, the internet, research strategies, using the online catalog, and

locating journal and newspaper articles. The librarians actively reached out to faculty and asked them to encourage students to attend the workshops and to even possibly make the workshops a requirement for the course. In 2001, to increase enrollment in the Library 191 course, the class was paired with English 101: making library 191 a one-unit class and English 101 a three-unit class. This not only boosted the numbers for the library course, it also provided an opportunity to assess the impact of the library instruction on student learning. Having the instruction sessions inside the library also allowed students to explore the library for themselves and gain first-hand exposure to the concepts they were taught (Moore et al. 2002). This information literacy programming initiative was designed extremely well because it was funded through grant money (which created no burden to the institution), involved both instruction and assessment, and effectively utilized collaboration with faculty. Community college students often need more direction regarding library usage and by combining an English course with library instruction gives them that extra push.

A Framework for a Successful Community College Information Literacy Program

Based upon my research and personal experiences with library instruction in community colleges, I have developed a framework that can help librarians design an effective and efficient information literacy program.

Framework for Community College Information Literacy Programming
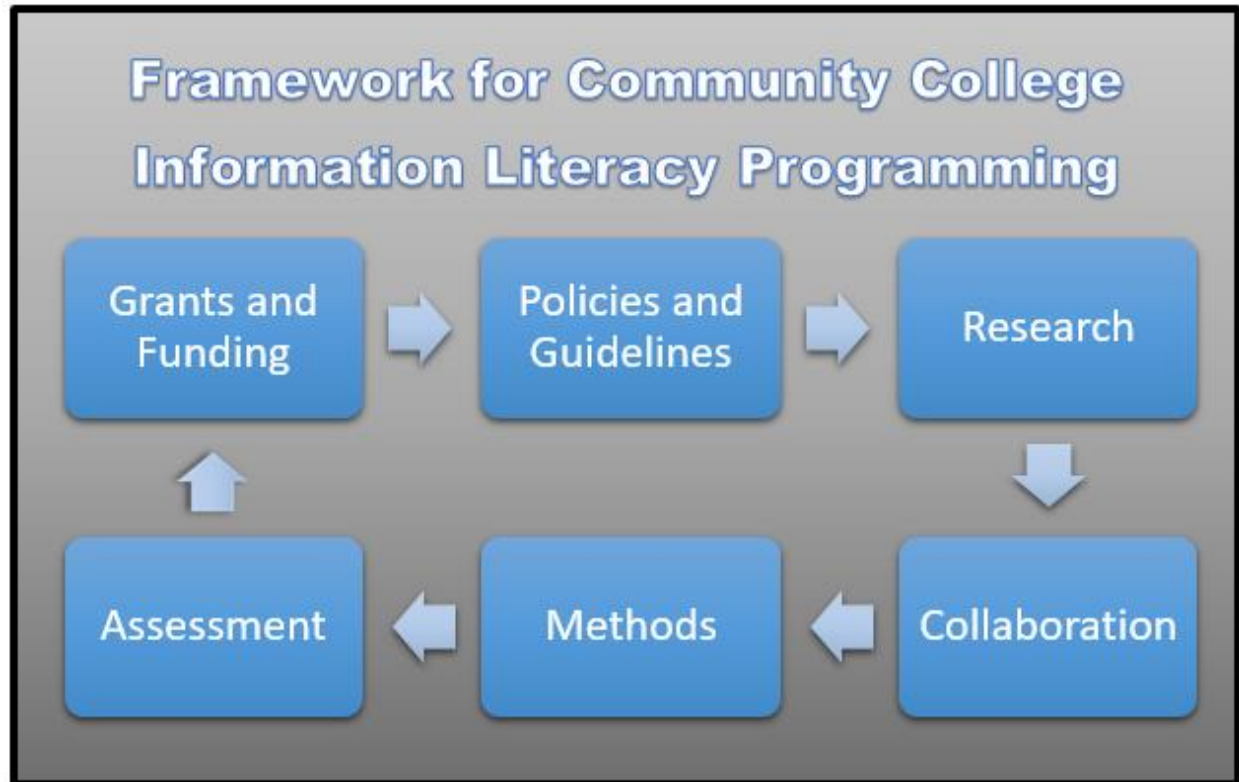
- **Grants and Funding** - Librarians can apply for grants from professional library organizations such as the ALA and ACRL. Individual institutions may also provide funding for information literacy programming. For example USC offers Information Literacy Course Enhancement Grants to faculty members that wish to collaborate with librarians in implementing information literacy instruction in their courses ("Information Literacy Course Enhancement Grants" n.d.)

- **Policies and Guidelines** - Professional organizations such as the ACRL and Academic Senate provide policies and guidelines for librarians to shape their information literacy programs around. These are carefully crafted core values and ideas that help bring together the most important concepts of library instruction.

- **Research** - Before embarking on designing an information literacy program, it is important to do research and learn what other librarians have done and are currently doing: what works, and what doesn't.

- **Collaboration** - Studies have shown that when librarians collaborate with faculty on an information literacy program, the learning goals are more defined, and the programs are more successful. This can lead to more faculty requesting library instruction which results in higher student attendance numbers.

- **Methods** - Use methods that research and studies have shown work well: encourage active participation, give out handouts and exercises, avoid repetitive searching, avoid multiple redundant questions, etc.

- **Assessment** - In order to determine the success of an information literacy program, assessment is very important. As some studies have done, a pretest before the instruction, and a post-test after the instruction is a good way to evaluate students' level of learning and retention. Having students fill out a survey assessing the instructor is also a good way to gauge the success of the session as well as how it can be improved.

Conclusion

When I reflect on my first bibliographic instruction session with that counseling class at LACC, I think about how it would have been much more helpful if I collaborated with a faculty member and incorporated more effective methods in my instruction. It is my hope that the framework I designed will not only help myself with my own future community college information literacy programming goals, but other librarians as well. Through a carefully constructed information literacy program, community college students can know more about the information resources available to them: giving them the tools they need to succeed.

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