

## Library Use Education: Current Practices and Trends

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DURING THE PAST DECADE, interest in teaching patrons about the facilities, services, use, and collections of academic libraries has reblossomed and flourished. Commitment to the importance of and necessity for instruction in library use and in research strategy became widespread and accepted. And, as the ranks of library instruction advocates grew, so also did the need for centralizing data and collecting materials. Practitioners could not individually keep up with the burgeoning activity, and were concerned about duplication of effort and material.

The idea for establishing a central clearinghouse agency to collect and loan both sample materials and the data from program methods was conceived in 1971, the result of a spontaneous, grassroots movement paralleling the growth of library instruction itself. In 1972 Project LOEX (Library Orientation/Instruction Exchange) became a working reality. After receiving essential financial support from the Council on Library Resources during the growing years of clearinghouse activity, the national LOEX office is now a totally self-supporting agency, and continues to function as a central exchange for library instruction programs in this country. As the number of library instruction programs in U.S. colleges and universities continues to grow, so does the clearinghouse collection of materials and its data base of facts and figures.

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To date, 830 libraries have filled out survey questionnaires and have deposited these descriptions with the LOEX office. It is these figures which are used to describe current trends and practices in the field today. There are also an additional 800-plus academic libraries with some sort of instruction activity which have not deposited completed questionnaires with the LOEX office, but of which we have some knowledge. Therefore, the statistics which follow are not totally representative from a national viewpoint. They are, however, indicative of those libraries which are probably the most interested and the most involved in the user education field, and thus reflect a relatively reliable picture of the national scene. Table 1 illustrates the variety of instructional approaches, methods, materials, and projects used in a wide range of library instruction programs today, in comparison to a similar survey conducted more than six years ago.<sup>1</sup>

These statistics provide a veritable gold mine of information for the researcher of library instruction trends, as preferences for particular instructional methods swell and wane as often as their effectiveness varies. Since each program is tailored to the needs of the individual institution, however, generalizations from these figures are not as easy or as reliable as it may first appear.

The fact that so many institutions willingly continue to share the user education materials which they have produced (only slightly more than 1 percent of the LOEX contacts prefer not to share their samples), and also to share the details of the development of these materials, is remarkable, considering copyright laws, publishing opportunities, and creative egos. By definition, the LOEX clearinghouse is a reciprocal exchange, the success of which is due in main to the cooperative attitudes of its members. It is refreshing to receive the level of cooperation which the office has consistently enjoyed—the reflection of a willingness which probably stems from the grassroots beginning of the movement, when practitioners turned to each other for support and encouragement.

In its role as a central collection agency, the LOEX clearinghouse holds a unique position. The clearinghouse does not itself practice the intricacies of library instruction; it collects the products, results, and opinions of those who do. In such a role, the staff can often remain more objective and keep a clearer view of the current national condition of instruction. Certainly, after years of collecting and listening, a central agency's staff is capable of noticing and summarizing trends in the field, and grows sensitive feelers which catch drifts and hints of activity before substantiating evidence appears.

## *Library Use Education*

Certain methods and materials are not in as widespread use and vogue as previously. Conducted tours, for example, are not as popular as they were several years ago. General library orientation programs using a slide/tape format may still be in use, but are expensive to maintain, difficult to revise, and often too impersonal to appeal to many patrons. Except on specific demand, bibliographies and simple lists of sources are not being produced on such a widespread basis; general lecture session outlines are becoming briefer as instruction librarians discover that being complex and verbose is not necessarily better. Hand-outs are becoming shorter as programs are simplified and refined. Similarly (and happily), the LOEX clearinghouse now receives fewer requests for "unique," "new," or "progressive" instruction samples, as practitioners realize that the best instruction need not be perpetually inventive. As a specific audiovisual tool, videotape has not appreciably grown in use as a teaching method. More library programs are being organized with guidelines and objectives in mind, and with input from the academic community; bandwagon approaches are less in evidence.

In contrast, some techniques and kinds of materials are being chosen and produced by greater numbers of instruction librarians. These trends are evidenced in particular by the requests for like samples which the LOEX office receives. For example, interest in computer-assisted instruction is expanding. Credit courses in library skills continue to be established. Self-paced/programmed workbook/exercises are in widespread use. Required units of library skills in beginning-level English, composition, and communication courses are more prevalent than in years past. The installation of unified systems of library graphics is now widely recommended. Audiovisual tools are being installed at the point of use, with the most effective programs lasting ten minutes or less. More libraries are using pretests to assess and measure the skills (or lack of them) and the attitudes of library users. Instruction in the use of data base searching and alternative methods of card catalog use is rapidly expanding. Finally, subject-related library instruction is growing; this type of approach helps to solve the universal problem of freshman-level orientation, which is often too much too soon, "a single massive inoculation...against all further needs for information-search knowledge."<sup>2</sup>

Advocates of instruction must continue to be concerned with the quality and pertinence of their programs. There are several related areas of user education in current need of attention and development. One must keep in mind Patricia Knapp's assertion that "faculty members, quite rightly, regard use of the library as a means toward the achieve-

TABLE 1. ACADEMIC LIBRARY INSTRUCTION STATISTICS

	<i>December 1979 (base 830)</i>		<i>May 1973 (base 193)</i>	
	<i>Number of Libraries</i>	<i>Percentage of Total</i>	<i>Number of Libraries</i>	<i>Percentage of Total</i>
<i>Enrollment Levels</i>				
Fewer than 1000	194	23		
1000-4999	305	37		
5000-9999	144	17		
10,000-14,999	70	8		
15,000-20,000	64	8		
20,000+	53	6		
<i>Type of Library</i>				
Community/Technical/ Two-year		25	31	22
Undergraduate	119	14	29	21
Graduate	26	3	9	7
Undergraduate/Graduate	395	48	64	46
Divisional	55	7	6	4
Special	26	3	6	4
<i>Staffing/Personnel</i>				
Part-time	759	91	126	91
Full-time	71	9	3	3
<i>Program Administration</i>				
Through reference department	287	35		
Separate division/Coordinator	37	4		
Haphazard/No response	-	61		
<i>Library Instruction Mandatory</i>	200	24		
<i>Levels Provided Instruction</i>				
Freshman	656	79		
Sophomore	465	56		
Junior	370	45		
Senior	369	44		
Transfer	229	28		
Faculty	254	31	49	35
Special groups	420	51		
<i>Instructional Methods</i>				
Credit courses	347	42	30	22
Seminars/Workshops	274	33		
Term paper clinics	173	21		
Lectures	790	95	102	73
Computer-assisted	18	2	6	4
Point-of-use programs	575	69		
<i>Tours:</i>				
Conducted	670	81	105	76
Tape	87	10	15	11
Slide/Tape	139	17	12	9
Printed self-guided	263	32	26	19
Individualized instruction	558	67	86	62

TABLE 1. — *Continued*

	<i>December 1979 (base 830)</i>		<i>May 1973 (base 193)</i>	
	<i>Number of Libraries</i>	<i>Percentage of Total</i>	<i>Number of Libraries</i>	<i>Percentage of Total</i>
<i>Instructional Materials</i>				
<i>Print:</i>				
Bibliographies	468	56	90	65
Subject guides/Pathfinders	335	40	51	37
Guides to tools	405	49		
Exercises	318	38	49	35
Workbooks	90	11	19	14
<i>Library handbooks/Guides:</i>				
Students	456	55	84	60
Faculty	179	22	32	23
Miscellaneous handouts	363	44		
<i>Nonprint:</i>				
Transparencies	330	40	21	15
Slides	145	17	27	20
Slide/Tapes	306	37	47	43
Tapes/Cassettes	204	25	24	24
Video	105	13	15	11
Film	53	6	8	6
Filmstrips	106	13	15	11
None	236	28	32	23
<i>Evaluation Methods</i>				
None	414	52	42	30
<i>Informal:</i>				
Faculty	58	7	20	14
Student	45	16	12	
Library staff	10	1	7	5
Testing	59	7	24	17
<i>Written feedback:</i>				
Student	164	20	31	22
Faculty	74	9		
Validated control groups	11	1	2	1
Faculty committee review	6	0.7		
General impressions of student performance	18	2		
<i>Publicity Methods</i>				
Signs/Posters	216	26	13	9
Personal faculty contact	657	79	112	80
Letters to faculty	289	35	12	9
<i>Student newspaper</i>				
announcements	257	31	57	41
<i>Faculty newsletter</i>				
announcements	168	20		
<i>Faculty committee</i>				
announcements	79	10		
<i>Engaged in Orientation</i>				
<i>Instruction Research</i>	324	39	27	14

ment of their own teaching objectives";<sup>3</sup> and librarians must maintain an objective view. Librarians ought not to become so involved with their own particular projects, stellar as they may be, or to place such emphasis on one particular method, that they lose an objective sense of the long-range picture. We need constantly to be assessing the total position and direction of library instruction in our institutions with a broad and impartial outlook.

Unless programs are well thought out and based on actual need, instruction can often appear monotonous, repetitive, superficial, more exuberant than reasoned, cliché-ridden, and based on naïve assumptions. We need to hear the reasons for failure of programs. We need a more standardized tool for measuring library use competence. Instruction programs are more often than not ethereal, and work needs to be done to embed the library skills unit, so essential for today's researcher, in more courses in higher education. Instruction practitioners must be assiduous in collecting and recording statistics, for keeping track of the particulars of project use is invaluable in judging the degree of impact and usefulness of activity.

To maintain enthusiasm and vigor, the instructional staff must avoid situations leading to all-too-common burnout: inadequate staffing and long, continuous hours of work; constant, low-grade stress coupled with a lack of independence; a feeling of isolation from fellow workers; and a feeling that the individual has little effect on the overall service—situations to which instruction librarians are particularly susceptible.

We also need more library school curricula which include teaching about instruction in library use, as schools are not equipping graduates with the knowledge and skills to compete for the orientation/instruction positions available today. Today's students need more than the expertise to explain the complexities of the card catalog; they need, Boissé asserts, "an understanding of the philosophical base for bibliographic instruction, a knowledge of the various approaches to the task, experience in designing a program through the delineation of clear, precise goals and objectives....[and] instruction in designing and producing materials which will assist them in implementing a program."<sup>4</sup>

How does the LOEX office assist a library instruction librarian who has not received this kind of training for user education? In response to several hundred requests for such assistance, and in an effort to provide a solution to the quandry so many face, the LOEX clearinghouse distributes the following guidelines as a starting point.

## *Library Use Education*

### *Suggested Outline Plan of Action for Basic Library Instruction*

#### *To Establish a Program:*

1. Consider the academic environment:
  - a. define academic setting: institutional nature, subject emphasis, programs, core courses, distribution requirements, size, resources
  - b. profile student/library user population
  - c. assess library personnel/materials
  - d. discuss tentative ideas with administrators/faculty
  - e. assess library interests/needs of total academic community
  - f. determine initial target/pilot group and program format for maximum practicality/effectiveness
  - g. discuss proposed program and organizational structure with entire staff/administrators; finalize plans
  - h. contact LOEX Clearinghouse for sample ideas to save time and avoid duplication of effort
2. Plan the library instruction program details:
  - a. write objectives for the program methods, utilizing faculty, staff, and administrative input
  - b. delineate personnel/support staff needs and responsibilities, needs for equipment/facilities/support services
  - c. list possible instructional materials to be prepared
  - d. compose a tentative budget
  - e. devise a projected timetable for implementation
  - f. design/plan evaluation methods/procedures

#### *To Implement the Program:*

1. Publicize the program to:
  - a. library staff members
  - b. faculty
  - c. students
  - d. all administrators
2. Prepare instructional materials to support teaching methods:
  - a. printed guides, worksheets, evaluation forms, handouts, etc.
  - b. media materials if needed
3. Test program on limited target portion of population
4. Implement program fully:
  - a. solicit support/involve library staff members
  - b. keep detailed statistics
  - c. conduct some evaluation each term

- d. write/revise annual objectives to keep attainment possible
- e. continue to publicize the program
- 5. Remain flexible and patient:
  - a. revise
  - b. simplify
  - c. expand
  - d. read in the field/attend conferences for inspiration
- 6. Keep the program working—changing as user needs change—for six to ten years<sup>5</sup>

To share a personal concern, it may be time to reemphasize the cooperative aspect of the roots of the successful growth of library instruction in our country. Through experience gained from the clearinghouse's role as an automatic monitor of the scene, I have noticed of late a faintly erratic pulse. This potentially disturbing signal may be the result of a preoccupation with promoting one's own library, invention or opinion; a proprietary attitude toward a certain method or tool; or, perhaps, the apparent reluctance on the part of a few "pioneers" to relinquish the narrow renown of a "holding forth" position. These attitudes and propensities should not override our real and common concern, that of promoting library user education as a legitimate and essential component of any library's total service program. Thus, those who claim any responsibility for the ongoing success of instruction should be most careful to avoid any hint of arrogance or patronization, as there are hundreds of new librarians in the field who are justifiably more concerned with how to adapt existing methods and materials than with paying homage to the materials' creators. After a decade of monumental effort and experimentation, it is time to put any sacred instructional cows out to pasture, and to consolidate in order to promote the importance of library instruction among peers and members of our academic communities.

Although it is presumptuous to propose a method of program implementation for every situation, since local circumstances determine the nature and content of any instruction activity, the needs of the library users will ultimately decide the future of the program itself. We must continue to alter programs as the needs of the users change, whether or not they veer in the direction we would like to see them move.

Past cycles of interest in library user education have failed because the programs themselves have declined in effectiveness. This decline, as Thomas Kirk has indicated, was the result of four weaknesses:



## *Library Use Education*

1. Those involved failed to distinguish orientation from instruction and therefore provided only the former;
2. The instruction or orientation was not given in a context of the student's need to know how to use the library;
3. The instruction when it went beyond orientation tended to take its scope and content from the reference training which librarians had received;
4. Librarians were not sensitive to educational changes that were occurring.<sup>6</sup>

To avoid repeating these mistakes, we must remain most objective about the role, scope, relevance, and limitations of library instruction. The majority consensus of librarians of LOEX member libraries reflect the notion that instruction, as they live and breathe and practice it, is not an end in itself. The use of the library and the application of search strategy is taught not in isolation, but in context with the library user's lifelong experience with information.

## **References**

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3. Knapp, Patricia B. "Guidelines for Bucking the System: A Strategy for Moving Toward the Ideal of the Undergraduate Library as a Teaching Instrument," *Drexel Library Quarterly* 7:218, July/Oct. 1971.
4. Boisse, Joseph A. "Library Instruction and the Administration." In Carolyn A. Kirkendall, ed. *Putting Library Instruction in Its Place: In the Library and in the Library School* (Library Orientation Series, no. 8). Ann Arbor, Mich., Pierian Press, 1978, p. 8.
5. Copies of the outline are available on request from the LOEX Clearinghouse, Eastern Michigan University Library, Ypsilanti, Mich. 48197.
6. Kirk, Thomas. "Past, Present, and Future of Library Instruction," *Southeastern Librarian* 27:16-17, Spring 1977.

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