ADVOCACY FOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC INSTRUCTION: A CHALLENGE FOR THE FUTURE

DAVID SAIA

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

ABSTRACT

Advocacy is the act of being a proponent for something. In the context of bibliographic instruction (BI) in the academic library, advocacy means working to see that the BI program is a productive part of the library program. The role of the BI advocate is examined in this light, given the enormous changes facing higher education and academic libraries, including increased social diversity, financial pressures, and technological change. In order for a BI program to be successful, careful attention must be paid to the essential elements of a BI program by the BI advocate. The work of several scholars is studied to develop an understanding of what these essential elements are. One of the most significant tasks the BI advocate must undertake is building a commitment to BI among the library staff. Reasons for resistance to BI are examined, and strategies to counter them are discussed. A review of professional literature on marketing BI to user groups in the academic community is conducted.

Advocacy is a powerful concept, defined in The American Heritage Dictionary as "the act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, an idea, or a policy..." The author's intent is to explore what a librarian must do to be an advocate for bibliographic instruction (BI) at several levels, including the university or community in which he or she operates, within the library, and in the profession. In the context of bibliographic instruction, advocacy means being a proponent: one who works to see that the design and management of a BI program is proper, works to ensure that the BI program receives necessary resources (by building support for BI from both within and outside the library), and ensures the continued success and relevancy of the program through proper evaluation, revision, and marketing. These three activities make up the core components of advocacy.

While there is a great deal of literature on developing and evaluating a BI program, not nearly as much has been published on marketing and building support for bibliographic instruction, the activities of advocacy. In particular, the issue of how to gain support from the academic community and administration (both inside and outside the library) has received little attention from scholars in the field. Many have issued "calls to arms" for those interested in BI to be proponents for it by making BI more central to the library and valued by the academic community. However, there is almost no literature advising people on how to accomplish these goals.

This paper will focus on what one has to do to be a proponent for BI in an academic library setting. Four areas will be discussed: the context in which bibliographic instruction operates in the academic library, the development of an understanding of the essential elements of bibliographic instruction, building a commitment to BI among the library staff and administration, and marketing and evaluating BI within the academic community. These areas are critical aspects underlying the three activities of advocacy outlined in the first paragraph of this paper.

THE CONTEXT OF CHANGE

No discussion of academic libraries can take place without an examination of the context in which these libraries are operating. Through an examination of professional literature and practice in the field, it is clear that the most compelling force at work within librarianship is change. This is especially true of bibliographic instruction. There are a number of change factors which affect academic libraries, including student demographics, higher education and library expenditures, and technological changes.

First, the racial and cultural backgrounds of students are changing as the United States is increasingly becoming a more diverse nation (Bureau of the Census 1993, 153). Our higher education enrollments will reflect this trend. Second, the age of higher education students will show more variation. Higher education enrollments will include older students (those over the age of thirty five) than ever before (National Center for Education Statistics 1992, 27). The implications of these trends for bibliographic instruction are clear. BI instructors are going to have to know more about cross-cultural teaching and education. Additionally, those teaching BI will have to have an understanding of the motives of older students and the previous life experiences they bring with them to higher education.

Expenditures in higher education are expected to continue to rise (National Center for Education Statistics 1992, 85-87). However, there are enormous social and political forces attempting to keep these expenditures under control. The competition for these funds within any given academic community is extremely severe. The library can be a perpetual victim in the spending battles for higher education because libraries do not generate revenues directly (and are therefore seen as "black holes"), do not have a pool of alumni who will be proponents for the library, and do not have a great deal of political clout on the campus. This economic tightening comes at a time when library costs such as books, serials, and periodicals are more expensive than ever. The impact of these forces on libraries is that libraries must develop additional sources of revenue such as grants and becoming more involved in campus politics, prioritize services so that those deemed as unjustifiable expenses can be cut, and re-examine services to ensure that efficient, "worthwhile" (according to local needs) services are offered. For bibliographic instruction, this means developing a BI program of high visibility and effectiveness. Such a program will be seen as an essential service, both inside and outside the library, and is more likely to get the resources it needs.

A third element is that of technological change. Anyone who has library or higher education experience must be aware of the change in information technology and the role of information in education today. The rise of CD-ROM technology, the Internet, online systems, and other computerized services has changed the way the library operates, and may even change the very nature of the library itself. Opinions on the impact of this change range from optimistic (with the library becoming more central and vital to the university) to pessimistic (with the extinction of the profession and the closing of most libraries for all but the most specialized services). Surprenant (1993) gives a good outline of three different outcomes for libraries and technology, ranging from optimistic to pessimistic. Tiefel discusses some of the negative perceptions about libraries and librarians and the implications of these perceptions in light of the technological (Tiefel 1993, 17-18). An important aspect of the technological revolution, one which complicates the providing of access to technology, is that the rate of technological change is increasing. Keeping up with current innovations and new and emerging services in information technology is a nearly impossible task. For bibliographic instruction, these conditions mean that the BI program must be continually monitored, evaluated, and revised to ensure that it is reflective of current technologies.

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF BIBLIOGRAPHIC INSTRUCTION PROGRAMS

The examination of change in academic libraries has gleaned several items which must be recognized as part of the core components of a bibliographic instruction program: well-trained instructors, high visibility and effectiveness, appropriate content, and continual evaluation and revision to ensure relevancy. This

sounds good. What BI librarian wouldn't want his or her program to be these things? A discussion of the implications of these criteria is necessary. In particular, the issues of effectiveness and relevancy need to be examined.

For a well-trained BI staff, there is no single course to follow. Each institution will have to select staff and develop its own training program according to institutional priorities. This rule of individual needs will be a recurring theme throughout this paper. In examining staffing, important consideration must be given to the following issues:

1. Who should teach?
2. How can limited staff resources be used most effectively?
3. Should all librarians participate or just those with special skills?
4. What skills are needed and how can they be developed?
5. How do instructional methodologies impact staffing levels? (McCool 1989, 18)

This is not an all-inclusive list of questions. However, it does touch upon the central issues related to having a well-trained BI staff.

An effective and relevant BI program is the goal of every BI librarian. Local priorities will again determine what such a program will entail. However, there appears to be some consensus on some of the criteria necessary for effective, relevant bibliographic instruction. Among the elements given by some BI professionals and researchers are:

- User receives instruction at point of need
- Faculty partnerships with librarians
- Instruction is course-integrated
- Instruction is on a cognitive level, focusing on strategies, not tools
- Incorporates both print and electronic information sources and technology
- Instruction is interactive
- Allows user to be self-directed and self-sufficient (Tiefel 1993, 7-8)

Taylor examines BI programs at three small liberal arts colleges: Earlham, Berea, and Sterling (Taylor 1993, 243-46). She focuses on the following as essential to successful BI:

- A commitment to teaching by the librarians
- Continuity in the program
- Close cooperation between faculty and librarians
- Support by library and university administration
- Use of technology only if it benefits instruction

These criteria are all admirable. They offer a useful shell or framework for building bibliographic instruction. However, more literature on what such programs look like, how they are developed, and how resources for them are obtained needs to be published. Tiefel (1993) describes several programs in her "Innovative Applications" article and the ALA *Sourcebook for Bibliographic Instruction* contains an excellent overview of the development and management processes. Despite these resources, more practical information is still needed.

BUILDING A COMMITMENT TO BIBLIOGRAPHIC INSTRUCTION AMONG THE LIBRARY STAFF

If academic libraries are to prosper in the Information Age, user education must become much more central to the mission of the library (Reichel 1993, 21-2). For this to happen, there must be a commitment to teaching on the part of the library staff (including the library administration). Getting the library staff to

support bibliographic instruction can be one of the most difficult aspects of advocacy for BI (Taylor 1993, 245). Not surprisingly, this is also an area were very few authors have published professional literature. The author could locate virtually no articles which discussed resistance to BI within the library and ways to counter it.

One way to build support for bibliographic instruction is to find out why people are against it, then build a case to counter those reasons, or accommodate reasonable objections. The following are the main reasons why librarians have reservations about bibliographic instruction (or user education):

1. Librarians are overworked; cutbacks in library expenditures have resulted in more responsibilities and duties for librarians. The idea of another responsibility when time is already so scarce can be demoralizing and debilitating.

2. Most librarians are not trained as educators. Teaching can be a very intimidating prospect, especially when one has little training. Many librarians have no background in education or teaching techniques.

3. Some believe bibliographic instruction to be ineffective. There are a number of librarians who are of the opinion that user education programs as they commonly exist (including library orientation tours and workshops) do not result in lasting or significant learning. Many of these people propose that resources be allocated for traditional reference services. A good overview of the arguments against bibliographic instruction can be found in Eadie's (1990) article which takes a "hard-hearted" look at BI and finds it lacking.

4. Some librarians want to have minimal contact with the public. There are those who enter technical services fields specifically because they do not involve direct interaction with users. For some, their human relations skills are lacking, or they enjoy more private, solitary work. The idea of the library becoming more education-oriented is threatening because it implies a significant change in the working conditions which brought them to librarianship in the first place.

5. Not everyone wants to teach. Related to some of the ideas listed earlier is the fact that not all librarians want to be teachers. There are many who recognize the difficulty of teaching and do not want to take on the challenge it presents, or know that they do not have the acumen or patience good instruction requires. Also, some view teaching as a monotonous task without any significant rewards.

6. For some librarians, BI is a threatening situation. There are a number of reasons librarians are afraid of at bibliographic instruction represents. Some fear failure in a new situation, others feel threatened by the paradigm shift that new technologies represent. Bibliographic instruction is allied with this paradigm shift, and is therefore a part of it.

The perspectives listed above contain valid criticisms. They represent barriers to the adoption of a user education focus for the library. It is the responsibility of the BI advocate to understand why individuals within the library are reluctant to support BI and then counter their resistance with arguments tailored to each person's fear:

1. The librarian who feels overworked must have a change in his or her responsibilities so that BI is not seen as an undue burden.

2. Training opportunities should be provided for those whose teaching skills are lacking.

3. Present evidence which shows the effectiveness of bibliographic instruction. Performing this on the local level through evaluation is preferable. However, research done at other institutions can be used to point out that BI can make a difference, if no other data is available. One good source of documentation on the impact of bibliographic instruction is David F. Kohl's (1985) book.

4. Develop and articulate a vision of the library which highlights the benefits of a dynamic, productive BI program.

Those who fear BI must be allowed to express their emotions in the hopes that doing so will help them come to understand what motivates their fears. The BI advocate needs to do the same thing: learn why particular individuals fear BI, and then present it in less threatening ways.

Finally, the author strongly believes that those who do not want to teach should not be forced to do so. There are few things more damaging to a BI program than poor instructors. These people can make other contributions to BI, including helping with evaluation, assisting in the preparation of handouts, and serving as outreach personnel or departmental liaisons.

Up to this point, the focus of this paper has been on removing resistance to bibliographic instruction. However, doing this does not mean that BI will become an institutional priority. The next step comes by showing how BI will benefit the library and the people that are part of it. This is especially important for building support among the library administration, which is recognized as a crucial element to the success of a user education program (Taylor 1993, 245; Tiefel 1993, 8). Library administration controls the allocation of resources and is therefore the key element in making BI a reality. Administrators can make it possible for job responsibilities to change so that people within the library don't seem so overwhelmed, help in arranging for staff development opportunities, allay fears about BI which threaten employees, and serve as role models in adopting a more user-centered orientation. "Library instruction must demonstrate its value continuously to the library administration, whence comes its allocation of resources" (Wood 1986, 15).

Winning the support of the library administration can be challenging. Fortunately, the same basic principles apply to motivating library administrators as do to library staff:

1. Find out what their concerns regarding BI are.
2. Understand what motivates them.
3. Build the argument in favor of BI towards those motivators.

In particular, it is essential to demonstrate that an effective BI program will improve the prestige, status, and political clout of the library within the college or university; the investment of staff time must be justified. This is the challenge for the bibliographic instruction advocate.

Based upon experiences and readings, the following important tasks are offered for creating an environment where BI is valued within the academic library:

1. **Articulate a vision.** Express an idea of what resources are needed for BI, how they can be obtained, and what an effective BI program can do for the library.

2. **Seek alliances within and outside the library.** Find like-minded individuals in the library and work together to influence library goals and directions. Also, identify faculty members who are intrigued by library user education and work with them; ask for their assistance and help them achieve their goals for their students.

3. **Start small.** A few well-done presentations will garner more positive attention than will a large number of sessions of poor quality.

4. **Take risks and negotiate.** Opportunities to prove the value of BI do happen, but they require a librarian who is creative and flexible. Work for a grant to fund a temporary program. If successful, it will make the case for BI stronger. Make deals with colleagues when appropriate, such as offering to try a solution to a problem in exchange for support for BI.

5. **Document your efforts and accomplishments,** especially those which show the effectiveness of BI. Poll students attending workshops about their confidence in using the library before and after instruction.

Librarians are sometimes hesitant to be vocal and aggressive. However, this may be necessary to bring attention to important issues. They are traits commonly associated with effective advocates.

MARKETING BIBLIOGRAPHIC INSTRUCTION TO USER GROUPS
IN THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

There are a number of excellent examinations of marketing techniques and their applicability to bibliographic instruction. The focus of this paper will now turn to a discussion of several writers and their publications in this area.

Many authors discuss the importance of making connections with the academic teaching faculty in designing and marketing bibliographic instruction programs. Faculty hold a great deal of the political power within most institutions of higher education, and they also influence library usage among students through the assignment of papers and projects.

Betsy Baker (1989) acknowledges the importance of the relationship between students, faculty, and librarians in developing bibliographic instruction. However, she believes that the library must be able to persuade the faculty that the well-educated individual needs to possess an understanding of the structure and value of knowledge (318). This is done by integrating bibliographic instruction into the research process and demonstrating the effectiveness of that instruction. Baker gives suggestions for improving communication and building closer ties between faculty and librarians, including personal contact with faculty, faculty orientation sessions, library liaisons, and service of librarians on academic departmental committees.

Craig Gibson (1992) looks at the issue of accountability and its relationship to bibliographic instruction. He believes the emphasis upon accountability in higher education gives librarians an opportunity to demonstrate the value of bibliographic instruction in building higher order thinking skills and problem solving. The barriers to such include the resistance of faculty to working with librarians, the lack of consensus with the library profession on the importance of and commitment to bibliographic instruction, and the inherent conservative nature of higher education, which resists change. Convincing the faculty of the value of bibliographic instruction is crucial to the success of the library. Suggestions for doing this include: working with the faculty to develop inquiry curriculum that has "real world connections," developing closer ties with writing-across-the-curriculum programs and critical thinking initiatives in local institutions, designing longitudinal studies of sample student populations and their competence in information-seeking over time, and working with academic departments to develop "information-seeking practicums" as part of student coursework (104-6).

Several authors advocate a more holistic approach. Elizabeth J. Wood (1986) gives an excellent overview of marketing strategies as they relate to user education in her article, "Marketing for Libraries: An Introduction and Overview." Wood discusses some of the fallacies and roadblocks which inhibit academic libraries from marketing user education services: the belief that offering a good product is sufficient, the creation of education programs which are out of synch with the objectives of the library, that success can make an entity inflexible, and the failure to continuously revise the educational program based upon changing user values. Behaviors exhibited by effective and non-effective marketers are examined. The steps in the marketing process that Wood advocates are: the marketing opportunity analysis, "...identifying and evaluating opportunities compatible with the organization's purpose as expressed in mission and goal statements." (4); selection of a target market; designing a marketing mix–a combination of product benefits, price, promotional activities, and distribution mechanisms to reach the target group; development of marketing systems to guarantee that marketing is fully integrated into the organization. Wood believes marketing to be helpful in ensuring that library services are the result of purposeful decisions, which is more likely to help the library become successful.

Jane Thesing (1985) also advocates a broad market approach in her publication, "Marketing Academic Library Bibliographic Instruction Programs: Case and Commentary." Thesing presents a case study of the rise and fall of a bibliographic instruction program where administrators failed to accommodate student needs, perceptions, and preferences in designing program components. One of Thesing's main contentions

is that a holistic approach is necessary in assessing student needs because others exert influence over students, thereby shaping and altering what they need (33). Faculty input is also necessary because they help determine student needs and attitudes towards the library.

Some have explored marketing on a more practical level, giving advice on basic marketing and public relations techniques. Zaporozhetz (1989) lists fifteen suggestions divided by the headings of building environment, outreach within the university community, and the general public. Peggy Barber (1986), the American Library Association's Associate Executive Director for Communications, offers insight into the public relations/marketing process and general user services for libraries.

One commonly-occurring theme which needs to be emphasized is the importance of visibility. Librarians must become more involved in the affairs of the academic community. The perception that librarians are isolated and out of touch is far too common (Tiefel 1993, 17). Often, it is the individual library's own fault. The profession tends to establish a large number of internal committees. Service on these bodies, while often worthwhile, robs time which could be spent making libraries and librarians known on the campus. Service on student conduct councils, departmental and college governing bodies, student affairs committees, and involvement with student organizations will increase the visibility of the profession and its mission. However, the administration of the library must make it possible for librarians to serve in these capacities. "The time spent becoming involved in educational activities outside the library should be perceived by librarians and library administrators as a legitimate and important component of a librarian's assignment" (McCool 1989, 23).

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined four important aspects of bibliographic instruction which are crucial for the BI advocate to understand: the context in which BI operates within the academic library, essential elements of library user education, building support for BI within the library, and marketing (or promoting) services within the academic community. The issues of design and evaluation of BI have not been covered because they are dependent upon local factors and have been addressed elsewhere in the professional literature in great detail. ALA's *Sourcebook for Bibliographic Instruction* contains sections on both design and evaluation of BI, and offers a fine starting point for the BI practitioner.

Advocates are those who speak for or take action on behalf of a worthwhile cause or person. In the case of BI, an advocate takes up its cause because he or she recognizes the potential it represents. BI helps to educate our users about information and instill them with critical thinking skills, provides one way to redefine our profession in a changing world, and assists in making a contribution to our academic communities. The advocate's responsibility is to help others see these possibilities, so they can be realized. The task is clearly enormous, but the rewards are worthwhile; there is value and efficacy in small victories. With the efforts of many librarians who share a common vision, BI stands a greater chance of success.

The Information Age has allowed us to move in directions not imagined one hundred years ago. However, with these new opportunities have come unexpected challenges. Librarians who are prepared to meet these challenges will help to progress the profession and enrich the value of what we offer our users.

REFERENCES

Baker, Betsy. 1989. Bibliographic instruction: Building the librarian/faculty partnership. *The Reference Librarian* 24: 311-28.

Barber, Peggy. 1986. Ten things I have learned about public relations. In *Marketing Instructional Services: Applying Private Sector Techniques to Plan and Promote Bibliographic Instruction*, edited by Carolyn A. Kirkendall, 65-8. Ann Arbor, MI: Pierian Press.

Bureau of the Census. 1993. Educational attainment, by race, ethnicity, and sex: 1960 to 1992. In *Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1993*, 113th ed., 153. Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office.

Eadie, Tom. 1990. Immodest proposals - User instruction for students does not work. *Library Journal* 115(17): 42-5.

Gibson, Craig. 1992. Accountability for BI programs in academic libraries: Key issues for the 1990's. *The Reference Librarian* 38: 99-108.

Kohl, David F. 1985. *Reference services and library instruction: A handbook for library management*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO.

McCool, Donna L. 1989. Staffing for bibliographic instruction: Issues and strategies for new and expanding programs. *The Reference Librarian* 24: 17-24.

National Center for Education Statistics. 1992. *Projections of education statistics to 2003*. Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office.

Reichel, Mary. 1993. Information use and projections: The importance for library instruction (and Dr. Seuss). In *What is Good Instruction Now? Library Instruction for the 90's*, edited by Linda Shirato, 19-24. Ann Arbor, MI: Pierian Press.

Surprenant, Thomas T. 1993. Welcome to obsolescence: What is good instruction now? In *What is Good Instruction Now? Library Instruction for the 90's*, edited by Linda Shirato, 1-6. Ann Arbor, MI: Pierian Press.

Taylor, Susan Krehbiel. 1993. Successful bibliographic instruction programs at three small liberal arts colleges. *Research Strategies* 11(4): 242-47.

Thesing, Jane I. 1985. Marketing academic library bibliographic instruction programs: Case and commentary. *Research Strategies* 3(1): 29-36.

Tiefel, Virginia. 1993. Innovative applications of technology to library user services. In *What is Good Instruction Now? Library Instruction for the 90's*, edited by Linda Shirato, 7-18. Ann Arbor, MI: Pierian Press.

Wood, Elizabeth. 1986. Marketing for libraries: An introduction and overview. In *Marketing Instructional Services: Applying Private Sector Techniques to Plan and Promote Bibliographic Instruction*, edited by Carolyn A. Kirkendall, 1-25. Ann Arbor, MI: Pierian Press.

Zaporozhetz, Laurene E. 1989. Fifteen ways to meet your user: Public relations and outreach suggestions for bibliographic instruction. *The Reference Librarian* 24: 289-96.