

12-15-2022

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Recommended Citation

Becker, J. K., Bishop Simmons, S., Fox, N., Back, A., & Reyes, B. M. (2022). Incentivizing Information Literacy Integration: A Case Study on Faculty–Librarian Collaboration. *Communications in Information Literacy*, 16 (2), 167–181. <https://doi.org/10.15760/comminfolit.2022.16.2.5>

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Incentivizing Information Literacy Integration: A Case Study on Faculty–Librarian Collaboration

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Abstract

Frequently, information literacy instruction takes the form of a one-shot library session with minimal collaboration between librarians and teaching faculty. To offer an alternative to this model, librarians implemented the Information Literacy Mini-Grant; an incentivized program inviting teaching faculty to collaborate with librarians to redesign an assignment to integrate information literacy into their course. Following the semester-long collaboration, teaching faculty provided written feedback and participated in a panel discussion to share their experiences with the program. This case study examines teaching faculty's perceptions of collaborating with librarians in the pilot year of the program. Teaching faculty's feedback provided insights into their perceptions of librarians, their thoughts regarding librarians' unique expertise as pedagogical partners, and the challenges of collaborations. This case study considers the successes and challenges of the program and provides recommendations for future faculty-librarian collaborations that position librarians as partners in student learning.

Keywords: faculty–librarian collaboration, assignment design, information literacy, librarian expertise, faculty perceptions, incentivized programs

Innovative Practices

edited by Andrea Baer, Carolyn Gamtso, and Merinda McLure

Becker, J. K., Bishop Simmons, S., Fox, N., Back, A., Reyes, B. M. (2022). Incentivizing information literacy integration: A case study on faculty–librarian collaboration. *Communications in Information Literacy*, 16(2), 167–181.

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Incentivizing Information Literacy Integration: A Case Study on Faculty–Librarian Collaboration

The University of Kansas (KU) Libraries have instituted a campus-wide instruction effort to integrate information literacy into the curriculum. The broad goal to integrate information literacy has been reflected in the library's strategic planning documents for the past decade. Most often, faculty and instructors at KU request a library instruction session that meets Pagowsky's (2021) definition of a one-shot: "a standalone session, superficially (or not at all) connected to course content, that is tacked onto a class" (p. 300). Usually, when a faculty member requests library instruction, the assignment and course content have been finalized, leaving little room for librarians to negotiate. While librarians strive to avoid a canned library spiel by customizing the class session to teach specifically to the information needs of the assignment, the opportunity for deep learning is often missed. To better integrate information literacy into the curriculum, librarians need to collaborate with faculty when they are planning their courses and designing assignments.

The effects of faculty-librarian collaboration on student information literacy skills have been well documented (Douglas & Rabinowitz, 2016; Gilman et al., 2017; Hulseberg & Versluis, 2017; Junisbai et al., 2016; Smith & Dailey, 2013; and Zanin-Yost, 2018). In each of these studies, librarians worked with faculty to redesign assignments and provide scaffolding for student learning. Student learning was assessed, and these collaborative efforts had a positive effect on information literacy skills. Most of the time, these collaborations emerged from librarians proactively seeking out opportunities to partner with individual faculty members and working to develop relationships with departments. This level of collaboration and impact on student learning can be challenging to achieve in one-shot instruction sessions. Thus, KU Libraries sought an alternative that would provide more opportunity to influence assignment design.

KU Libraries established the Information Literacy Mini-Grants (ILMG) program in the fall 2018 semester to offer teaching faculty a financial incentive to collaborate with librarians to integrate information literacy into their courses. The aim of the ILMG program was to put librarians in a position to embed information literacy at the point of need for students and demonstrate their expertise as partners in assignment design and pedagogical best practices. A secondary aim for the program was to equip teaching faculty with information literacy knowledge they could apply to their other courses and share with departmental colleagues.

Librarians chose to incentivize the program to encourage participation. Although programs that incentivize collaborations with librarians are not described often in the literature, some have looked at stipends attached to participating in librarian-facilitated assignment redesign workshops (Wishkoski et al., 2018), information literacy courses tied to required technology certification (Veach, 2009), and an assessment mandate with financial incentive to participate in a course grant program to integrate information literacy into courses (Jumonville, 2014). While these studies did collect feedback from participants regarding motivation for participation and perceptions of information literacy, they did not examine teaching faculty's experience collaborating with librarians.

This case study examines teaching faculty's perceptions of collaborating with librarians in the pilot year of the ILMG program through qualitative analysis of a panel discussion with program participants and the written feedback provided by participants at the conclusion of the program. The authors of this paper were all members of ILMG project teams; therefore, the interpretations of the data include insights gleaned from our participation in the program. The paper concludes with a discussion of the successes and challenges we experienced in the pilot year of the program and recommendations for librarians considering implementing a similar program at their institutions.

ILMG Program Overview

Modeled on the University of Southern California Libraries' (n.d.) Information Literacy Course Enhancement Grants, the KU program awarded three mini-grants in the amount of \$500 each. Funding for the pilot year of the program came from the Dean of Libraries, who offered a seed fund for library employees who proposed innovative new programs. Funding for subsequent years is allocated in the library's budget for teaching and learning programming. Faculty and academic staff (non-tenure track faculty) teaching a 3-credit hour undergraduate course in any department were eligible to apply. The library shared the call for applications via faculty listserv, social media, and by forwarding to departmental contacts.

In an effort to foster a collaborative relationship between teaching faculty and librarians, we provided grant recipients with a list of program outcomes that the project teams would meet. These outcomes included developing an information literacy learning outcome for the assignment, establishing a baseline metric for student information literacy skills, creating a rubric to assess information literacy skills, and adding appropriate Creative Commons

licensing to assignment materials. Each ILMG project team met three to five times during the fall semester, and both the teaching faculty and librarians worked on the assignment redesign between meetings. Grant recipients were expected to implement the redesigned assignment in the course the subsequent spring semester and to share student work with librarians for the purpose of information literacy assessment. Collecting student work proved challenging; therefore, student learning assessment is outside the scope of this case study.

Faculty Perceptions of ILMG Collaborations

The authors utilized a qualitative analysis approach to examine and interpret the comments from a panel discussion and written feedback from participants about their experience with the ILMG program. Prior to scheduling the panel discussion, the authors submitted the study to the Institutional Review Board for Human Subject Research. The study was approved, and informed consent forms were provided to participants along with the invitation to the panel discussion. Each of the three teaching faculty who participated in the ILMG program signed the consent forms and agreed to the recording of the panel discussion. Of the three participants, two were tenure-track faculty and one was a non-tenure track faculty member.

The qualitative analysis approach employed in this case study embraces what Anselm Strauss (1987) refers to as experiential data, which includes the technical knowledge, research backgrounds, and personal experiences that the researchers bring to their analysis. The small sample size limited our ability to employ the constant comparison method of grounded theory (Creswell, 2009), but we nonetheless followed the systematic steps of grounded theory in our approach to coding and categorizing our data. After reading through the panel transcript and written feedback to obtain a general sense of the information, each author utilized an open-coding strategy (Corbin & Strauss, 2007) to label and describe themes. The authors met to discuss our open-coding categories and came to a consensus regarding the final set of themes that emerged from the analysis. The five themes that emerged were librarian expertise, labor imbalance, pedagogical conversations, domino effect, and student skills.

Librarian Expertise

A number of comments in the panel discussion spoke to a recognition of librarian expertise as both different from the teaching faculty's own expertise and valuable to the assignment

redesign process. One participant noted that applying to the program was a “leap of faith because we don’t use the term information literacy that much,” implying that they might not have been sure what information literacy meant but knew that librarians would bring a new lens to their assignment design. Another participant noted that the experience was “a little bit daunting, just learning a new vocabulary.” Both of these comments identify information literacy as a concept that was new and outside the scope of the teaching faculty’s expertise.

Participants mentioned the practice of scaffolding information literacy skills throughout the assignment and course multiple times. When librarians think of scaffolding, we consider identifying the point of need for students when they should learn or practice a certain skill. Library and information science researcher Carol Kuhlthau (2004) described these points as “zones of intervention” and defined them as areas “in which an information user can do with advice and assistance what [they] cannot do alone or can do only with great difficulty” (p. 129). It is not surprising that faculty discussed scaffolding in their comments as this language was used by librarians through the course of the ILMG collaborations. Identifying the points of need to scaffold skills was a new approach for some faculty participants. One participant described librarian expertise in this way: “[Librarians were] exemplar [sic] in their ability to assist in scaffolding those information literacy skills throughout the semester.” Another comment noted that librarians were not “just thinking about one assignment, or one set of goals, but [were asking] how do assignments continue to introduce students to skillsets that you want for the end of the semester?” Rather than focusing solely on the assignment redesign, faculty noted that librarians sought to take a holistic view of the course to find areas where scaffolding could support the goals of the assignment.

Comments such as “having the latest cutting-edge tools” and “someone else trained in this area” indicate an understanding that librarians keep up with the research in their field in similar ways that faculty keep abreast of the latest research in their own fields. One participant stated that librarians “have that great working knowledge of the undergraduate population and can bring that level of expertise in addition to their incredible expertise relating to information literacy writ large.” Librarians’ information literacy expertise allows librarians to make distinctions between foundational and advanced research skills. When discussing assignments, librarians can provide input about the kinds of questions students often ask with assignment prompts in hand and can identify the areas where students may struggle. These discussions with faculty aided in the assignment redesign process.

Not only did participants recognize librarian expertise, but they also understood that some faculty on campus remain unaware of this expertise. One participant noted that “if we’re considering how to scaffold these research skills throughout the curriculum, there are resources in the libraries. There are experts and scholars who are able to assist, on an individual level, or even on the larger curricular level that unfortunately some faculty may not be aware of.” This implies that while librarians may already assist teaching faculty with their instruction and research, these participants now recognize librarians’ expertise in the pedagogy of information literacy.

Labor Imbalance

Some comments during the panel discussion indicated an imbalanced division of labor during the ILMG collaborations. When commenting on the collaboration between librarians and faculty, one participant said that the “librarians that I worked with and my students did the lion’s share of the work.” While this was likely meant to be a compliment, it reveals that this participant knew that their contributions were less than the librarian’s. Another comment summed up the expectation for librarian work by stating “librarians are gonna help me with that.” Again, this comment was made with enthusiasm toward the ILMG program, but it made us wonder if we set an expectation that we would take care of a problem when what we intended to do was collaborate toward a solution.

Another participant noted, “[The] two librarians I worked with did an immense amount of research to bring structure and help me integrate...so yeah it was a very smooth collaboration.” Again, this comment recognized that librarians worked extensively on the project, but it is unclear how the librarians were viewed as collaborators. Furthermore, while librarians developed a number of resources to be integrated into this course, there was never any confirmation from the faculty that the suggestions were fully integrated. Even though the collaboration was incentivized, it did not consistently equate to balanced contributions from the librarian and the teaching faculty.

Pedagogical Conversations

While teaching faculty may not think of the library as a space where they can discuss or improve their teaching, feedback from participants indicated that the librarians had fostered such pedagogical conversations. When asked if they would recommend the ILMG program to colleagues, one participant responded, “Of course I’d recommend it. It’s incredible to be [in] a research institute, but I really miss something about graduate school, which was the ability to have conversational partners about pedagogy.” This sentiment appeared in other

comments as well, such as “to work with anybody who has a different skillset and perspective than you do helps immensely.” When one participant commented that “you all really brainstormed with me,” it underscored how librarians were invested in discussions about the courses and how to help students successfully complete assignments. These pedagogical conversations were an opportunity for the teaching faculty to describe where students struggle to meet expectations and for librarians to provide insight, from an information literacy perspective, as to why those expectations were not being met.

Throughout the ILMG program, both librarians and teaching faculty increased their knowledge of the other’s field of study: librarians learned about course content, and teaching faculty learned about information literacy. Thus, it was not a surprise to hear one participant comment that “[the program] gave me a lot of fodder to think about pedagogical tools.” Participants’ understanding of information literacy would evolve between project team meetings, and the conversation would advance each time the teams met. A second participant commented that “to really look at my syllabus and reformulate it and shift it around...because *nobody sits with you to look at your syllabus* [emphasis added].” Librarians have the unique experience of seeing a variety of syllabi as we often request them when planning for library instruction sessions. This experience gives us valuable insight when sitting with a faculty member who is revising a course to help them look at the entirety of the class.

Domino Effect

As evidenced in participant comments, the ILMG program created a continuous reaction, or domino effect, on pedagogy. Participants expressed interest in incorporating new pedagogical strategies into other courses they teach, extending the benefits of the program. A specific strategy mentioned was scaffolding: “[More] scaffolding with the final project. I haven’t done that with my other classes so now I want to do more of that.” A second participant reflected on how the ILMG experience impacted their teaching as a whole: “I learned perhaps more than my students did in going through the process of thinking about information literacy with regards to designing the particular assignment that we’ve worked on, but that also made me rethink some of the processes of teaching.”

The domino effect from these collaborations extended beyond the classroom into curriculum design at the departmental level. One participant stated that “being able to bring that experience to [the] departmental level when we’re thinking about how to increase

information literacy skills” was a benefit to participation in the program. Lastly, ILMG participants felt an increase in accountability and intentionality in their teaching. One noted that the program “forces you to say, how do we want student outcomes to be better? How do we relate those to our own pedagogical practices, to eliminate the assumptions that we have about what students know or don’t know when they come into the semester?” While the ILMG program intended to redesign one assignment, participants were able to consider their teaching in its entirety.

Student Skills

The assignment redesign process forced teaching faculty to take a step back and evaluate how and when the various pieces of their course came together. One participant noted that “[their] main challenge...was working with librarians and having to translate disciplinary concepts to [them]...but that was also a huge benefit because it forced me to ask important questions about assumptions I made, about skillsets that students should [have] at the end of the capstone research class.” This example acknowledges that if teaching faculty needed to explain concepts to librarians, they might be making assumptions about what their students know as well. This participant’s response also demonstrates that they had learned the value of information literacy skills beyond an academic context by considering what skills graduates need after completing the capstone course.

A second participant remarked that adding an annotated bibliography assignment provided an opportunity to evaluate student work and their own assumptions about students’ skill levels. Recalling the librarian’s suggestion to provide guidance regarding the publication date of sources, they noted, “Think about your time period, and think about relevant sources that were written during that time. It’s so obvious, but we don’t teach that. So that’s a crystallization of how well the [grants] are helping me think through the assumptions I make about what students know.” This suggestion clearly stuck with the participant and opened their eyes to skills that students need in order to effectively complete the assignment.

The panel discussion took place in the middle of the semester to coincide with the call for applications for the second round of ILMG. Therefore, participants were unable to comment as to whether students’ information literacy skills had improved as a result of the ILMG program. At the end of the semester, faculty participants were given the opportunity to provide written feedback to comment on improvements in student work and evidence of students’ information literacy skills in the final assignments. Two out of three faculty

submitted written feedback. One participant shared that the final papers were more succinct and the arguments demonstrated a more critical evaluation of course readings. The second participant provided less feedback on information literacy skills and lamented more on the students' poor oral presentation skills. Conflating information literacy skills with oral presentation skills might indicate the faculty participant remained unclear as to what information literacy means.

Discussion

The themes that emerged from participant feedback provide insight as to how librarians are perceived by teaching faculty at our institution. Additionally, these themes help us to understand the successes and challenges we experienced with the ILMG program. The goal of the program was to integrate information literacy into a course through the redesign of an assignment via collaboration between librarians and teaching faculty. While some program outcomes were met with success, others proved challenging or were not met at all. Despite the challenges we faced, the successes of the ILMG program indicate the potential to grow the library's contribution to teaching and learning at our institution and provide a model for professional practice as other librarians consider approaches to collaborating with teaching faculty.

Successes

The finding that the ILMG program provided space for pedagogical conversations is important as we consider how to market opportunities to collaborate with librarians. Most higher education institutions have teaching centers for faculty and instructors that are dedicated to modifying, improving, and assessing teaching and learning. These spaces may be the default when faculty seek assistance with their teaching. However, libraries can serve as an additional space on campus where these conversations can take place. Ducas and Michaud-Oystryk (2003) identified assessment and curriculum development as potential areas of interest for faculty to collaborate with librarians. The ILMG program provides an opportunity for pedagogical conversations that will illuminate our expertise, leading to future collaborations.

The ILMG program was successful in spreading goodwill about the expertise of librarians. The experience collaborating with librarians made an actual contribution to the understanding of information literacy and grew awareness of this facet of librarian expertise among participants. The program gave teaching faculty a language to describe and strategies

to address issues they see in student work pertaining to accessing and using information effectively. Additionally, each participant aided in disseminating information about future ILMG opportunities to their colleagues.

Finally, the outcome to add Creative Commons licensing to all assignment materials so they can be discovered as Open Educational Resources (OER) was successfully met. These assignments, along with guidance for how they may be adapted for other courses and disciplines, can be found in *KU Scholarworks* (<https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/>) by searching “ILMG.” The intentional sharing of assignments as OER makes it easier for teaching faculty and librarians to adapt these assignments for their own use and highlights librarians as assignment designers. Our hope is that these assignments serve as examples for librarians to use in their own information literacy programs.

Challenges

Although teaching faculty did recognize information literacy itself and pedagogical strategies as areas of librarian expertise, this recognition did not translate to perceiving the librarian as an equal partner in the assignment redesign. While there were a number of comments that genuinely acknowledged librarian expertise, there were other comments that hinted toward labor imbalance. While none of the librarians who contributed to ILMG projects felt exploited, we each experienced moments during the collaboration where our efforts were dismissed. For example, the team may have discussed designing a worksheet to be used as scaffolding toward a larger assignment, only to find out at the next meeting that the faculty member had changed their mind, taking the assignment in a different direction and leaving the librarians with a worksheet that no longer applied in the context of the course. This experience is not unique to the ILMG program. Douglas and Rabinowitz (2016) examined the collaborative experience of both faculty and librarians and found that there was a “discrepancy between faculty and librarians’ perceived collaboration levels” (p. 154). Although faculty were willing to discuss their courses and assignments with their librarian partners, they did not “incorporate their colleagues’ ideas” and librarians felt “they weren’t active instructional partners” (p. 154). Each ILMG project team did produce a revised assignment as a result of the collaboration; however, significant work went into designing supplemental materials to support the assignments that were never implemented.

Although the ILMG program was marketed as a collaborative opportunity, the librarians often felt that the faculty member was in charge and saw them as an assistant rather than an equal partner in the assignment revision. The program goal to redesign a single assignment

may have limited the ability to establish a truly equal partnership since the faculty member was responsible for designing the full course beyond the one assignment. Regardless, we believe this experience speaks to the fact that much of the time librarians *are* perceived as service providers rather than partners. Christiansen et al. (2004) found that faculty understand librarian duties as service-oriented, particularly focused on organizing and providing access to information and other resources. In their 2003 survey of faculty, Ducas and Michaud-Orystryk found that information services (assistance with finding information) ranked as the most important librarian role. Findings from the ILMG program suggest that the entirety of a librarian's role remains unclear to faculty members.

We intentionally designed the ILMG program to allow for the assessment of student learning. Project teams were expected to write an information literacy learning outcome for the assignment, set a baseline metric for meeting that outcome, create a rubric to assess this aspect of the assignment, and collect and assess student work to determine whether the learning outcome was met. These expectations were a moving target due to the fact that teaching faculty would revise assignments between meetings without letting the librarian know about changes. One librarian participant felt as if they had to start from scratch at each meeting, spending half the time reminding the teaching faculty what was discussed previously. Sloniowski (2016) highlights that the term *information literacy* is not well-known outside of the profession, leading to librarians' work in the area being under-recognized. We hypothesize that the struggle to finalize the learning outcome, baseline metric, and rubric had to do with the teaching faculty failing to fully grasp what information literacy meant for their course.

The theme of labor imbalance extends beyond comments made in the panel discussion to the biggest challenge librarians experienced with the ILMG program. As we critically reflected on the impact, challenges, and possibilities of this program, we realized that the imbalance we felt was connected to the fact that we were unable to assess student learning from the ILMG pilot year. Even though we requested the assignments from our teaching faculty partners, they never provided copies of the completed assignments. The imbalance lies in the fact that librarians worked to redesign an assignment to improve information literacy skills, but the teaching faculty did not hold up their end of the bargain to share the student work with us. The only indication of improvement in students' information literacy skills we were able to obtain was in the form of anecdotal evidence from the teaching

faculty's written feedback. We conclude that this situation is connected to teaching faculty perceptions of librarians serving a support role rather than a partner role.

Recommendations

Considering how teaching faculty perceived the ILMG collaborations and reflecting on our own experiences with the program resulted in our adjusting outcomes and other aspects of the program moving forward. Based on the changes we've made to our own program, we recommend that librarians who are considering developing similar programs clearly communicate expectations to faculty participants at the onset of the collaboration. Based on a suggestion from the panel discussion from the pilot year, we recommend holding an introductory meeting that presents the foundations of information literacy to faculty participants. This meeting would serve to establish a common understanding of information literacy and lay the groundwork for each project team to begin their collaboration, as well as review the outcomes for the program and set clear expectations for team members.

To address the issue of assignment and course revisions that occur without communication with the librarian partners, we recommend creating a shared file space with a discussion board where both the teaching faculty and librarian can add thoughts pertaining to the assignment redesign as they arise, as well as upload new documents as they are created. Additionally, we suggest that at the end of each project team meeting a list of clear action steps for each partner be documented and agreed upon. This process would provide clear documentation, next steps, and an understanding of what each partner would work on between meetings.

Finally, we recommend that librarians discuss with their faculty partners the importance of implementing the assignment fully and make a plan for how the librarians would be involved in assessing the information literacy aspects of the assignment. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, including the option to assist with grading the final papers. If a program such as this one includes outcomes related to the assessment of student learning, it is essential that librarians emphasize the expectation that copies of completed assignments be shared in order to achieve the librarians' goal to assess student learning from an information literacy perspective. We recommend writing a formal agreement that outlines these deliverables that would be signed by each project team member. Librarians may also consider withholding the grant award money until all program outcomes have been met.

Conclusion

The ILMG program is a step in the right direction to move from a one-sided, one-shot, service-provider model of information literacy instruction toward a collaborative partnership in designing meaningful learning experiences for students that improve information literacy skills. As evidenced in our (albeit small) data, collaborative work between teaching faculty and librarians does build awareness of librarians' areas of expertise and creates opportunities for pedagogical conversations. Incentivizing the program gets faculty in the door, but once they are in the room, they are better able to see the depth of resources and expertise available at the library.

The goal to integrate information literacy into the curriculum is a nearly impossible task. Nonetheless, librarians continue to strive toward this goal through our instruction programs that include one-shots and opportunities for collaboration such as the ILMG program. The reality is, no matter the prevalence of information literacy goals in library strategic plans, faculty will never prioritize information literacy the way that librarians do. It is not surprising that Arendt and Lotts (2012) found that librarians consider library instruction and curricular integration more important than do faculty. For many librarians, information literacy instruction is the core of our work and often a metric by which we are assessed. While we may never convince faculty of the importance of this work, we can continue to demonstrate our expertise through collaborative efforts such as the ILMG program.

We learned that though our efforts felt disproportionate at times, the domino effect at play has the potential to grow the ILMG program. It is clear from the panel discussion and written feedback that the teaching faculty had a positive experience with librarians. We hope they will carry what they learned from this experience into other aspects of their work and share their knowledge with colleagues to raise awareness of librarian contributions beyond providing access to information. It was disappointing that we were unable to assess student learning in the pilot year of the program, but we maintain that the experience was worthwhile because we have a better understanding of the perceptions of teaching faculty and how we can improve the program in the future. Teaching faculty did learn more about information literacy, and they discovered that they have passionate, dedicated partners in the library who are experts in their own right.

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