Information Literacy Collaborations that Work

Information Literacy Collaborations that Work should certainly be of interest to academic and community college librarians engaged in the noble task of information literacy (IL) instruction. The volume is a very pragmatic addition to the Information Literacy Sourcebooks series. Librarian and faculty collaboration is showcased as an effective approach to reaching students at their point of need for information. The fourteen case studies included in the work provide tangible means and practical examples for improving the quality of student research.

According to the work’s foreword, the volume should be related to the 2000 publication of The Collaborative Imperative: Librarians and Faculty Working Together in the Information Universe by Richard Raspa and Dane Ward as it continues and updates the discussion of this specialized topic. For those readers interested in a broader perspective on issues surrounding IL instruction in academic contexts, the 2004 publication Integrating Information Literacy into the Higher Education Curriculum edited by Ilene F. Rockman may be of use. It includes discussion of librarian and faculty partnerships but details many other aspects of this integration process. Finally, this volume is likely to gain relevance to the larger body of IL related literature because its content implies some commentary on the effects of the introduction of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education on librarian and faculty approaches to IL instruction.

The example collaborations discussed are grouped into three sections: each section emphasizes a perspective or a factor that impacts on the nature of the instructional collaboration and approach to IL instruction. The first section examines how librarian and faculty collaboration can occur in the context of different kinds of academic programs, as it considers campus-wide program implementation. The second part emphasizes the importance of taking into account the IL needs of students studying a specific discipline. The third section is concerned with the challenges of incorporating technology into IL instruction.

Each section is introduced with a short essay, which highlights key strategies for fostering instructional collaboration relevant to the chapters within a particular section. These introductions are useful for quickly determining the relevance of a section for a reader’s interests. Appendixes of marking rubrics, sample assignments or worksheets follow the essay to which they relate, and they are one of the most valuable aspects of the book. They provide a focused reader with models and templates to be adapted for their own instructional needs and academic context.

Each chapter is a thorough exploration of an instructional collaboration. Typically, the discussion begins with a review of the intellectual framework and background
important to the particular collaboration. This varies from a miniature literature review to a citation of inspirations for the work to be described. Regardless of the specific academic context for the instructional collaboration, this background covers a similar terrain. The ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education are often referred to as a legitimizing force for the instructional work of librarians and as a departure point for librarian-faculty discussion. Inquiry-based learning is a frequently mentioned concept that has helped to position and embed information literacy instruction in the context of a discipline and a specific student need for information. The chapters then proceed with a history of the course and the collaboration, a synopsis of the changes to instruction made as a result of the collaboration, an evaluation of the changes in relation to student performance, and plans for future improvements.

The primary value of this volume is that it conveys the variety along the cutting edge of academic IL instruction. Particular highlights include: “Responding to the Needs of Our Graduate Students: A Pilot Information Literacy Course in Graduate Education,” a collaboration focused on supporting graduate students as they return to school, and “Writing in the Guise of a Persona: Combining Basic Reading; Library Research and Video Performance,” which describes a collaboration that uses video recording to document IL competencies gained by developmental learners. Both examples contribute to the IL literature by articulating the process of addressing the needs of these specialized student populations. Such alliances illustrate librarians and faculty can develop innovative approaches to and utilize new technologies for IL instruction. Overall, this volume effectively documents the successful collaborations that can make a case for better supporting IL instruction.

The major difficulty of this work is that the chapters summarize developments occurring over a number of years. The usefulness of the strategies for generating librarian and faculty collaboration is somewhat mitigated by the obvious length of time needed to succeed with such an approach. As well, the academic style of the writing is logical given potential audiences for the work, but it hampers the expression of the passion that the various authors must have brought to these instructional endeavours. Overall, it is a challenging read and, very likely, even those who are expert in IL academic instruction will pick and choose chapters based on their professional needs and interests.

Would be readers may want to check out the Education Institute’s audio conference Information Literacy Collaborations That Work scheduled for January 17th, 2008.

Laura Emery, Librarian Intern, laura.emery@gnb.ca, New Brunswick Public Library Service, Fredericton, NB.

This review copy was provided by way of The OLASore. Neal-Schuman titles are distributed in Canada by the OLASore. Members of the Partnership (http://www.thepartnership.ca/)
will generally receive a discount of 5-10% on most publications. For further information about this title, please visit www.accessola.com/theolastore or contact orders@accessola.com.