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A Course of Our Own: Taking an Information Literacy Credit Course from Inception to Reality

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Abstract

Since 2009 librarians at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia have been teaching a fully weighted (half-unit/three credit) course in information literacy (IL), LIBR2100: *Introduction to Research in the Information Age*. Course sections are capped at 30 students with classes offered on campus in a traditional classroom/lab environment, and via distance using multimode technology. Now firmly established in the University's curriculum, required in three programs and an elective in all others, the course is in demand with growing wait lists requiring that multiple sections be offered each term.

While the literature supports the positive outcomes of IL credit courses for both the students enrolled and the librarians teaching, few universities or colleges currently offer such an opportunity. Based on our positive experience at the Mount, accomplished with a professional librarian compliment of only five, we strongly recommend other universities and colleges consider seriously their ability to offer their own IL course.

This article reflects on the steps taken by librarians at Mount Saint Vincent University to get a credit course in IL on the books, how we managed course implementation, and negotiated the inevitable workload demands. While we also briefly discuss course objectives and curriculum, and their evolution over time, these are not our primary focus. Because the literature is largely silent on the mechanics of getting an IL course

mainstreamed in a university or college curriculum, this article focuses on outlining the phases of credit course development and traces an IL course from conception to reality.

Keywords

Information literacy, credit courses, critical IL, teaching, workload

Introduction

Mount Saint Vincent University Library offered its first section of LIBR2100, *Introduction to Research in the Information Age* in the spring of 2009. This half-unit (three credit) undergraduate course is taught by the academic librarians and administered by the Library. The course is capped at 30 students and is offered on campus in a traditional classroom/lab environment, and via distance using multimodal technology. Now firmly established in the University's curriculum, the course is in demand with growing wait lists requiring that multiple sections be offered each term. LIBR2100 has become a required course for majors in Communications, Science Communication, and for Writing minors, and is a highly recommended Humanities elective for all other students. As of the spring of 2017 over one-thousand students have taken the course.

This article reflects on the steps taken by librarians at Mount Saint Vincent University to implement a credit course in information literacy (IL). It discusses our approach to many of the issues that arose as a result of the course's introduction including implementation, generating campus and library support, managing workload demands, and its implications for the collective agreement. This article will also briefly discuss course objectives and curriculum, and their evolution over time. Finally, the article concludes with a discussion of future research directions.

Literature Review

In reviewing the Canadian and American library instruction landscape, the course at Mount Saint Vincent does not stand out as unique in terms of librarians as teachers; however, credit courses in information literacy are still not the norm at universities and colleges. A recent survey by Cohen et al. (2016) of US institutions of higher education found that only 19% of schools offer information literacy credit courses taught by librarians, and of these courses only 24% were more than two credit hours. A 2014 survey by the Canadian Association of University Teachers found that of the universities surveyed, 16% had academic librarians teaching Library credit courses as part of their regular workload. In the case of the Canadian data, there is no information to indicate if the courses are of equal weight to traditional discipline-based credit courses.

Why are more universities and colleges not offering credit-bearing information literacy courses? In the last decade the academic librarian community has begun to see strong arguments in support of stand-alone credit courses in IL. Work done by Badke (2008), Hollister (2010), Mery, Newby and Peng (2011), and Leonard and Smale (2013) all support the argument that there is a continued need for better course offerings for college and university students who struggle to understand and critique an ever-shifting

information landscape. Badke is so direct as to say that information literacy is “foundational to our very definition of ‘education’” (2008, p. 47). When looking to the outcome literature, Cook (2014) provides some of the most striking evidence. Her review of twelve years of data for over 15,000 students who took a library-based IL credit course shows that these students graduated at much higher rates than students who had not received such training.

There is also ample evidence that most librarians see teaching as a key component of their professional practice (Julien & Genuis, 2011; Loesch, 2010; Simmons, 2000). Kemp (2006) aptly summarizes the benefits of librarians teaching credit courses as including “closer interaction with students over an extended period of time, a deeper understanding of faculty workloads, student needs, and administrative requirements, new ways of looking at collection development, enhancement of faculty status, increased intellectual stimulation, and sharper self-assessment of performance” (p. 5). Interestingly, while many librarians spend as many hours, or more, in the classroom as faculty, as a profession we have not lobbied for greater pedagogical autonomy in our area of expertise. Little has changed since Owusu-Ansah’s (2007) lament on the limited teaching done by librarians. He suggested that we accept:

teaching engagements that predominantly preclude credit-offering authority. This continues to be the overwhelming professional stance of librarians in an academic world in which credit is the currency by which centrality is expressed. Credit offerings command the attention of students, faculty, and administrators and serve as the key indicator of what an institution considers essential in the education of its students (p. 417).

There are studies and personal accounts that try to explain why the profession has not taken up the credit-course model in greater numbers. Findings suggest (Cull, 2005; Julien & Genuis, 2011) that while librarians are passionate about library instruction, and view it as a basic component of our professional identities, there are other factors at work that dissuade librarians from pursuing more teaching. Julien and Genuis identified a lack of support by library administrators and an unpreparedness (though not unwillingness) of librarians to teach. Owusu-Ansah concurs that administrative support is a problem and also identifies a concern from librarians about workload. Badke (2010) suggests more widespread systemic problems – that IL is still misunderstood in administrative circles, and of real interest to only librarians. A review of curriculums at all Canadian MLIS/MIS degree granting institutions indicates that a course in Information Literacy is not a requirement of any of the programs and is instead offered only as an elective. This makes one wonder if Badke’s concern is more widespread, and information literacy is of interest to only the sub-set of librarians who teach or instruct.

While these concerns cannot go unnoted, it is sometimes necessary to try to frame them in different ways. In 2009 Julien and Pecoskie interviewed 48 instruction librarians (who routinely provided IL instruction) and documented their consistent feelings of power imbalances with faculty. Participants reported that in many cases an IL class was deemed successful if negotiations with the faculty member were a success, rather than students’ learning outcomes. If this is not a call to librarians that a new model of

information literacy instruction is needed, then what is? In a slightly different context, Brooks and Chesnut (2016) reported that instruction librarians at their institution who were encouraged to focus on their teaching had “more creativity in the classroom and actually served to revive their enthusiasm rather than cause burnout” (p. 12). Another natural by-product of credit courses taught by librarians “is an energized and revitalized role for the library on campus” (Kemp, 2006, p. 5).

One way in which the library is taking on an “energized and revitalized role,” is through a growing community of academic librarians who advocate for incorporating critical pedagogy into the teaching of information literacy and credit IL courses. In his seminal paper, *Critical Information Literacy: Implications for Instructional Practice*, James Elmborg (2006) calls on us to develop a “critical practice of librarianship” (p. 198) whereby we work with students less to transfer skills, and more to encourage them to develop critical consciousness (p. 193). Though his work, and those who have built upon it (Baer, 2016; Drabinski, 2014; Swanson, 2011; Jacobs, 2008) we have seen the development of new and exciting IL credit courses such as “Research and Documentation in the Information Age” offered by librarians at New York City College of Technology. In articles by Beilin and Leonard (2013) and Leonard and Smale (2013) librarians learn that it is possible to dispense with rule-based teaching, and also incorporate social justice issues into a library credit course. The theme of social justice is also seen in the work done at St. John's University, New York, where IL and social justice are co-taught in the course “Teaching Social Justice in an Information Literacy Course: An Action Research Case Study” (Rioux, 2013). Baer describes how teaching something as perfunctory as database searching can “emphasize how information systems reflect and often privilege certain conversations and voices” (Conclusion, para 3). In his publication that describes how and why librarians are introducing critical IL into their classes, Tewell (2016) shares examples for one-shot and credit-bearing classes that challenge learners with a variety of critical concepts such as power, gender, exclusion, access, etc. As such, critical pedagogy is an important development in the teaching of information literacy and IL credit courses. These examples served to guide the theory for our IL course and contributed to its natural evolution.

The previous paragraphs demonstrate the rich body of literature on credit-bearing IL courses that provide abundant guidance on course design, theory, and curricula. For example, good additional overviews of credit course development include work done by Daugman, McCall and McMahan (2012) at Wake Forest University, Burke (2011) at Hofstra University, Bernnard and Jacobson (2002) at the University of Albany, Wilkinson and Cairns (2010) at the University of Tennessee, and Goebel and Neff (2007) at the University of Alberta's Augustana campus. These reviews provide useful case studies in course design and curriculum development, with Gobel and Neff also identifying some of the workload challenges for librarians. Hollister's (2010) edited book, *Best Practices for Credit-Bearing Information Literacy Courses*, continues to inspire. However, none of these articles or books outline in detail the process involved in implementing an IL course and the workload realities of getting a credit course approved and inserted into librarians' already full workload. This is also true for the broader literature of non-traditional teaching units (e.g. writing centres etc.) who offer for-credit courses (Crosby, 2006; Boswell, 1992). Questions we have received from colleagues suggest that there

is a need for more information and dialogue on the initial phases of IL credit course development and implementation and as such, we feel our current article helps to fill an important void in the literature.

Context, Building Support

Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU) is a small university located in Halifax, on the east coast of Canada. Undergraduate degrees are offered in Arts, Science, Education, and a number of professional programs with graduate degrees offered in select disciplines. The student body averages approximately 4000. The Library is also small: five professional librarians are full members of the faculty association; a University Librarian and 12 library technicians/assistants round out the staff complement.

The Mount has long valued personalized education and small class sizes (www.msvu.ca). The Library has worked to reflect these values by offering varied research and reference services both on campus and online (e.g., drop-in and appointment-based research help, small group sessions, roving reference), and tailored in-class instruction (from the “one-shot” class, to course-integrated IL instruction over a number of weeks). For a number of years, we happily continued down this path while trying to maintain currency by introducing new services on a regular basis.

In the fall of 2007 during a regular meeting with the recently hired University Librarian (UL) a question was posed: “What do you love about your job?” Surprisingly, this was something never before asked by an administrator. While “the students and teaching” was the immediate response, the conversation provided the opportunity to brief the UL on our instruction program and an experimental, but ill-fated, “Introduction to University” credit course that had run a few years previously, which included a three-week, nine-lecture library module. The UL was intrigued but asked why, instead of piggy-backing onto an existing course, we had not proposed our own library course? The answer was simply that we did not have the professional staff to offer such a course. The next question was, “*what would have to change to make such a course possible?*” The list was long and varied, and ranged from fewer reference shifts and one-shot workshops to hiring more professional librarians and providing them with individual offices.

While there would be challenges getting a course off the ground, framing the initial conversation in terms of how to make it possible allowed us to proceed with preliminary planning and consultations in the following areas:

- Building librarian support by creating dialogue with all the professional librarians in order to gauge and build interest in a library credit course
- Receiving support from the University Librarian
- Building campus support by involving faculty, academic support services, and students

Building Librarian Support

It was agreed that a broad dialogue needed to occur with all the professional librarians in order to gauge interest in a library credit course. Because there was a need for all librarians to consider and weigh the value of an IL credit course, librarians were supplied with a short reading list, and there was agreement to set this as a standing agenda item at librarian meetings, which were held every second week, for the remainder of the academic year. At a subsequent planning day in the spring of 2008 the academic librarians and UL considered in detail how a library our size could offer an IL credit course taught by librarians and administered by the Library.

A key outcome of this planning day was learning that not all librarians were interested in teaching such a course. Of the five librarians, two were very interested in course design and teaching; a third was interested in delivering such a course; but two librarians nearing the end of their careers decided that while they supported their colleagues' participation in such a course, they themselves would not be key players. Every library will have its own work culture, and formal workload language if governed by a collective agreement. Our situation allowed senior librarian members to opt out of credit teaching, while all new hires would have credit teaching included in their contracts.

Other elements that were essential for early consideration were workload balance, time for teaching, designing a curriculum proposal, and building campus support. While we had confidence in our ability to deliver a future IL course, it was workload that occupied our minds during this early stage. Heavy workload demands and lack of time for librarians to carry out what are often competing responsibilities are well documented in the literature. Numerous studies (Berg, Jacobs & Cornwall, 2013; Brown, 2001; Koufogiannakis & Crumley, 2006) confirm that librarians struggle to balance the "professional practice, scholarship, and service elements of our careers" (Fox, 2007, 461). Librarians at the Mount already had rigorous research requirements; by introducing formal teaching into this mix, were we setting ourselves up to be spread even thinner on the job? The librarians and University Librarian considered carefully some of the most time-consuming work – reference and one-shot library instruction – in order to plan how to apportion time to a credit course offering. Details on workload strategy are provided in the next section; however, there was agreement that a course could not be launched without rethinking how we delivered some traditional services. This consensus, agreed to at the very early stages, was pivotal to providing the right atmosphere in which to develop the course.

Support from the University Librarian

The role of the University Librarian as a course champion has been key to the course's success. Not only was there support for the course itself, the UL also understood that credit teaching would add to the librarians' already full workload. This would require redefining other library services and altering some workload.

While the academic librarians saw as their responsibility the matters of curriculum, and IL theory and praxis, the UL assumed responsibility for ensuring administrators understood that librarians were capable teachers, and that the Library was able to assume responsibility for administering the new course. In addition, the UL championed the course to administrators from the perspective of employability skills as developed by the Conference Board of Canada (www.conferenceboard.ca). These skills stressed competence in the areas of communication, numeracy, information management, critical thinking and problem solving, and life-long learning. These themes complemented well the ACRL Standards of the day (ACRL, 2000), and drew the interest of departments such as Student Services.

Understanding where we were each dedicating our respective energies, the UL made presentations and provided regular updates to deans, department chairs, the university registrar, and academic support units such as the Writing Centre and International Office.

Building Campus Support

In order to best introduce the idea of a library-based credit course to the university community we first provided an information session to all library staff and identified point people if questions arose (e.g., the University Librarian would be responsible for communicating with administration, and the academic librarians took on the role of working with faculty, students and library staff). We prepared quick Q&A sheets on information literacy, listed other schools with IL or library-based courses, provided a reading list for those who wanted to consult the literature, and tabulated our vast instruction statistics to demonstrate that we were an experienced “teaching department.” Throughout the consultations described below the most negative reaction we experienced was indifference, but even these individuals embraced the idea of an IL course when they learned more about our proposal.

Faculty and Academic Support Services Involvement

Our decision to involve faculty and other academic support units early in the course planning process was more strategic than a requirement. While consultation is required by Mount Saint Vincent University for all new course proposals that impact other programs, departments have a lot of autonomy in this area. The Library’s position was that by consulting broadly we would identify potential difficulties early and avoid disappointment at a crucial moment. While faculty members and deans would review our proposal at the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee, and vote on it at Senate, librarians believed that building grass roots support for the course would help us in the long term.

In conversations with faculty members, librarians learned the things that concerned them about student research included a perceived rise in plagiarism, a lack of scholarly content used in assignments (the Google factor), and citation duplication among student papers which often resulted from students researching the same topic in the same database. Faculty hoped that a library-based IL course would address some of these

issues, and we were able to assure them that this was exactly some of the material that would be built into the curriculum.

While it was generally useful to hear faculty concerns about student research and how faculty believed a credit course may aid students, it was important to remember that this was a library-based course taught by librarians who have academic freedom. Information literacy course designers should be encouraged to accept the faculty recommendations that make a proposal stronger and avoid those that seem more like personal requests.

In order to build support with faculty and other academic support services, library representatives met with a number of units/divisions on-campus:

- Senate Library and Senate Teaching & Learning committees both had the opportunity to comment on draft proposals.
- Representatives of Writing Initiatives, student retention, academic advising and international students were briefed.
- Departments that offer research methods courses were encouraged to comment if they had concerns that a library-based course could one day replace traditional discipline-based methodology or statistics courses.
- Departments of Information Technology and Information Management were asked to review the proposal and alert the Library if they had concerns about overlapping curricula. Librarians made a special effort to meet with these departments to outline curriculum and learning objectives.

Consultation resulted in a strong consensus that an information literacy credit course would not only complement the University's current course offerings, it would also address topics and themes that other departments do not have the time or expertise to teach. The time we took to consult not only alleviated any concerns about the course, it also built interest in and support for the course. Because librarians do not have the same kind of access to students during the advising process, by consulting and seeking input we also generated free advertising. Academic advisors and student services counsellors who heard about the course during meetings, presentations, or brown bag lunch and learn sessions are now some of our biggest course promoters.

Student Involvement

Because we wanted students to be interested in taking this course their input was also sought in order to determine what content they would find most relevant to their studies. Students were consulted in two ways:

1. Conversations with student reference regulars and student assistants working in the Library.
2. Consultation with the Students' Union and student representatives on select Senate committees.

Students identified important content for inclusion in an IL course such as citation practices and learning where to look for the “best information.” Most students were familiar with databases but many confided that they used the same database for everything. Librarians received a lot of positive, anecdotal feedback about the course from students. All the students’ feedback was kept in mind when building the course modules and, where possible, included as components in the final curriculum.

Following these consultations we began to finalize our course proposal. The next section details how we navigated this unfamiliar process.

Course Approval, Design and Implementation

Figure 1 below illustrates how the Library, a unit previously not viewed as a teaching department, navigated the many steps required to get a credit course approved. The initial two boxes have been discussed in the previous sections; we now review the course proposal, design and implementation; and the related workload considerations.

Figure 1. Course approval and design process for the IL credit course at MSVU

Course Proposal

In order to receive course approval, senior administration agreed to recognize the Library as a teaching department. The Library then submitted a formal new course proposal to the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UCC). The UCC is comprised of faculty, students and administrators, and meets monthly to review new courses. Once

the UCC recommends a new course, it is sent to the University Senate for final approval. As these proposals are considered departmental submissions, ours required the consensus of all librarians. While the document was worked on by two librarians and the University Librarian, there were periodic reviews provided by all librarians.

Information required by the UCC included seven key elements:

1. Basic calendar information (course name and number, and description);
2. Curriculum logistics such as enrollment projection, major/minor, required/elective, cross listing, consultation with other departments;
3. Reason for introducing the course;
4. Description of the course including objectives, general topics, texts;
5. Required resources including space, timetabling, facilities such as library resources, computer resources and Distance Education options;
6. Faculty able to teach the course, full and part-time considerations;
7. Departmental considerations including departmental approval, priorities, frequency of offering.

While each university or college will have its own set of procedures for course approval, these seven elements provide a sense of the breadth and depth of information required when new courses are under consideration. Our course proposal went to the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee as “LIBR1000: A Critical Introduction to the Information Age: Information Literacy and Research.” Much to our delight it was returned to us with the suggestion it be listed at the 2000 level. There were a couple of reasons for this; on a practical level there is a limit on the number of 1000 level courses students can take, but in terms of content the UCC felt the course was too advanced for the 1000 – or even 2000 – level. On a less delightful note we were asked to reconsider the course name. Through consultation with the UCC we settled on “LIBR2100: Introduction to Research in the Information Age.”

Starting in 2009, LIBR 2100 was listed as a half-unit (three credit) elective open to all students enrolled in an undergraduate degree program. The UCC recommended the course receive a Humanities designation as students in the professional disciplines often struggle to complete a required number of Humanities electives. In the future we may revisit this with the aim of cross-listing the course as Humanities and Social Sciences given both broad disciplines are reflected in the course content. The UCC also capped the course at 30 students per section following our submission request of 25-30. While 30 students are manageable, we would recommend lobbying for a cap of 25. Time spent communicating with students and on evaluation is extensive. Smaller classes simply means more time for students and keeps workload manageable.

The course is described in the University calendar as follows:

LIBR 2100: Introduction to Research in the Information Age

Prerequisite: recommended that students have completed one term of study
An introduction to research including frameworks for the organization of information in print and online; critical strategies for acquiring, evaluating and

communicating information; and ethical and legal (intellectual property, copyright, plagiarism) obligations of using information. Information sources across various disciplines, formats and media will be considered.

The prerequisite of one semester of study was included as it is useful for students to have had a taste of university-level research so they “know what they don’t know.” The requirement is easily waived, but appropriate for the majority of students. While the course is designed for students in their first or second year of university study, many have taken the course at later stages of their programs.

Curriculum Design

The LIS literature provides much to consider in terms of IL credit course curriculum, with a selection of some excellent sources provided in the Literature Review. While the goal of this paper is to describe the mechanics of getting an IL course approved, details are shared on curriculum and learning objectives in order to provide context for the course implementation and workload demands.

LIBR 2100 was never envisioned as being primarily skills-based – as Leonard and Smale say so succinctly, we were not interested in “teaching undergraduates to act like librarians” (2013, p. 143). Librarians agreed that students emerging from the course should have been exposed to, and developed IL skills through critical and creative reflection on a variety of information issues. Far from the ACRL Standards (2000) of yesterday, and more in step with the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (2015) of today, librarians bring to their curriculum a critical approach to information literacy that takes into account “the social, political, economic and corporate systems that have power and influence over information production, dissemination, access, and consumption” (Gregory & Higgins, 2013, p. 4).

The following chart details the learning objectives of the course as they were originally conceived and as the course currently operates. The initial work was done by one librarian with the update completed by two librarians working in tandem prior to co-teaching the course. The revision work also provided the opportunity to include Universal Design for Learning principles which enhance the accessibility of the online offering of LIBR 2100.

<p>Table 1</p> <p><i>Learning Objectives</i></p>	
Learning Objectives 2009	Learning Objectives 2016
<p>At the conclusion of this course, the student should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze and critically evaluate information; • Locate and retrieve information sources; • Use and apply information effectively; • Recognize and articulate a research problem; • Develop appropriate and effective search strategies; • Demonstrate an understanding of the organization of information systems; • Select and use information retrieval tools. 	<p>At the conclusion of this course, the student should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize and articulate a research problem; • Demonstrate an understanding of the information cycle as applied to a research problem; • Demonstrate an understanding of the organization of information and its systems; • Apply strategies for locating and retrieving information appropriate for a research project; • Evaluate and critique information sources for accuracy, authority, objectivity, purpose, currency, and appropriateness; • Conceptually and physically organize relevant information including references; • Use appropriate technologies when creating and communicating information; • Demonstrate an understanding of plagiarism and copyright as ethically applied to the research process; • Consider how cultural, social, economic, political, legal and ethical issues influence how we search for, create, access, organize, disseminate and use information.

Relevant to the design of LIBR 2100 is a University recommendation that courses with multiple sections have shared learning outcomes. Librarians at the Mount have opted to use these standardized learning objectives in their syllabus; however, this practice is

tempered by academic freedom provisions which allow librarians to modify objectives, and design their own curriculum, syllabus, and assignments. While this responsibility is taken seriously, and all course sections look different, and reflect personal strengths and interests, librarians also meet frequently to discuss classes. We share teaching strategies, assignments that worked well, and stumbling blocks encountered. This shared effort helps manage workload, and allows librarians to access a wide range of curriculum resources and keep content very current without having to work independently at every stage.

Course Implementation

The first section of LIBR 2100 was offered by Distance Education in the spring of 2009. We opted to deliver the course via Distance in this first teaching instance for two reasons. First, Mount Saint Vincent University's collective agreement had course relief and instructional design provisions for distance courses. This allowed us to hire a part-time librarian to work 1.5 days per week, which in turn provided dedicated time for librarians to work on curriculum design. Second, the course was intended to be offered in different formats, and librarians wished to design the course for proper online delivery. It is arguably more challenging to convert an already existing face-to-face curriculum to a distance mode, than vice-versa (Bonk & Dennen, 2003; Redmond, 2011).

As described above, the work on curriculum design was aided by the provision of course relief. Before beginning work on a new Information Literacy course, we encourage librarians to review the teaching sections of collective agreements or faculty handbooks at their institutions. Contract language related to teaching is often unfamiliar to librarians and it is possible there are useful provisions for allotting time for course development. If such provisions are not available, and we admit our situation may be unique, we recommend lobbying for at least one day per week to work on curriculum design in the term preceding delivery of the first section of a new library course. Even if you are building a course around an existing curriculum, we consider this time essential to focus the course to your own particular situation. Emily Drabinski (2014) spends considerable time in her article "Toward a Kairos of Library Instruction" discussing the value of "context" and how every teacher needs time to personalize course content, to refocus their gaze to their own classroom (Drabinski, 2014, p. 485). For a course to be meaningful and relevant to your university and group of students (i.e., your context) you will need time to focus on "the teaching situation in front of [you]" as this "requires present-tense investigation and reflection to get locally right" (p. 485).

Contract Negotiation and Workload

Collective Agreement

Librarians at Mount Saint Vincent University are part of the Faculty Association and governed by a Collective Agreement shared by teaching faculty, librarians, and lab instructors. Librarians and faculty share all articles in the collective agreement with the exception of Workload; minor variations exist in articles that govern Appointment, and

Reappointment, Tenure/Permanence, and Promotion. When the course was first envisioned librarians knew there would be a need to insert language into the Agreement that described our new teaching responsibility. Because we were in the midst of an Agreement cycle there was an opportunity to trial different workload models before we committed ourselves to language to which we would be bound.

There was consensus among the librarians and the University Librarian that while there would be multiple sections of the course offered throughout the academic year, each librarian would teach only one section per year. This provides librarians with two terms (fall, winter or summer) free from credit teaching and parallels faculty workload language. There is also the attempt to spread out our teaching so as to not all be teaching simultaneously. This benefits students who want a variety of course times and librarians who work collegially to manage busy schedules.

When the Collective Agreement was renewed almost two years after we began teaching LIBR2100, the following language (indicated in italics) was inserted to cover this new responsibility:

Article 24.1: The following elements constitute Librarian members' workload: professional practice; scholarly and/or professional activity, and internal and external collegial service. *Professional practice may include the teaching of one half-unit LIBR course per Agreement year.* In addition, a librarian member's workload may include administrative service.

This statement acknowledges our teaching without micromanaging how it is accomplished. However, the tying of teaching to professional practice is not an approach we recommend as it fails to recognize teaching as a distinct workload activity. Librarians believe that by allowing our teaching to be subsumed by professional practice it is not treated on par with the teaching done by faculty. This is discussed in greater detail by Raven, Holyoke & Jensen (2014). While we have not been successful in disentangling teaching and professional practice, or having our teaching recognized as meriting more monetary compensation, we have successfully negotiated for the right to teach another half-unit (three credit) as overload, compensated at the regular faculty overload stipend rate.

Workload Implications of LIBR 2100

Since the introduction of LIBR2100: *Introduction to Research in the Information Age* we have delivered the course in all formats offered by our university: in the classroom/lab (in bi-weekly and once-a-week classes), by distance using multimode technology (Blackboard Collaborate), and in a blended session where some students were present in the classroom and others participated at a distance. In all cases we agree that teaching a credit course is very intensive work, far more so than the one-shot classes which, for most of us, were our only prior teaching experiences. Librarians recognized that it was necessary to carve out time to dedicate to ongoing curriculum work, creating relevant and interesting assignments, grading, meeting with students, and staying current in the field. There is also the work never imagined: students who do not attend

class and fall behind, students struggling with the stress of university, international students who may be struggling to adapt to a North American education system with poor English-language skills, and the ever-present matter of plagiarism, from which librarians imagine they will be immune, but nevertheless occurs.

With the support of the University Librarian, librarians took a hard look at workload in order to find time to dedicate to teaching. In addition to professional practice, librarians all had busy internal and external service and committee roles, plus responsibilities for scholarly and/or professional activity that mirrors that of faculty with similar publication requirements. After much consultation, the approach taken focused on reframing reference, instruction, and dedicated time for course preparation.

Reference

In light of declining reference transactions at our institution, and supported by the literature (Bunnett et al., 2016; Coleman, Mallon & Lo, 2016; Stevens, 2013; Applegate, 2008), senior library assistants and MLIS students began to serve shifts on the reference desk. While there was consensus that it was important to maintain reference service hours, we decided that librarians did not need to provide *all* the frontline service. In an effort to reduce reference workload during the term in which a librarian is teaching the credit-course, they serve only one two-hour shift per week on the reference desk.

Today approximately 75% of our reference hours are covered by non-librarians. That is not to say these individuals answer 75% of the questions, but they have become a point of first contact and, with training, are extremely capable reference assistants. In differentiating between “reference” and “research” assistance, librarians were able to find more time to dedicate to higher level functions like teaching and providing appointment-based research assistance.

Instruction

Tackling heavy one-shot teaching loads has been an evolving process. In the early stages of the course, librarians were not called upon to teach one-shots or offer research appointments during the term in which they were teaching LIBR2100. Instead, librarians not currently teaching the credit course took up these sessions. While this did not reduce the amount of time we spent in the classroom, the more even redistribution of work throughout the academic year had a positive impact on our workload. More recently, due to the introduction of a liaison-model of library instruction, this model is no longer in place and librarians teach the credit course and one-shots simultaneously. While librarians are busy during their credit-course term, as teaching became a normal and familiar part of workload, relief from one-shot classes became less necessary.

We advise that libraries introducing IL credit courses initially provide semesters free from one-shot instruction for teaching librarians. This was essential for us while the new program was in the early stages and workload adjustments were made. We further recommend offering newly hired librarians a term free from one-shots when they begin

teaching a credit course similar to how some universities provide newly hired faculty with reduced teaching loads in their first term or year.

Dedicated time for course preparation

For the course to be a real success, librarians needed more than a break from reference shifts and one-shot workshops. To that end, the term in which librarians are teaching, they are able to work one-day per week strictly on course related matters. This time is in *addition* to the time spent in the classroom, and may be taken on or off campus. During the course's development both our UL and her successor acknowledged that teaching involves not just what happens in the classroom but also good preparation, keeping content current and relevant, keeping on top of grading, knowing and communicating with students, and having time to reflect on best pedagogical practices. Both University Librarians under whom this course has run have always supported our use of this time for course work, and as we approach the course's 10-year mark, we hope we will never have to defend its value. We have an established precedent that while not documented in the collective agreement, is a mainstreamed professional practice.

Conclusion

While many of the pragmatic reasons for offering credit courses in information literacy are identified earlier in this paper, the most significant for librarians at Mount Saint Vincent University continues to be our work the students – the same factor that started us on this adventure in teaching in the first place. Working with a group of students for a full semester is a privileged and enriching experience. Having time to study the lifecycle of information and draw in real world accounts; challenging students to consider the inequities inherent when creating, accessing and disseminating information all add meaning to our work as academic librarians. While it is unlikely an IL credit course will dramatically reduce one-shot classes, our experience demonstrates that the academic autonomy gained through teaching an IL credit course brings with it benefits that far outweigh added workload.

There has not yet been the opportunity to consider student outcomes of the course. Anecdotal feedback and qualitative responses from students during formal course evaluations has been very positive. We hope to do a more rigorous analysis of outcome data as it relates to student retention and GPA at graduation in the future. Work by Cook (2014) suggests that IL credit courses “have a lasting and measurable impact on student graduation rates” (p. 282).

Despite its workload challenges, teaching a credit course in IL is the best ongoing professional development available. It informs our reference work and one-shot classroom instruction resulting in improved reference and instruction practices overall. We have learned about academic advising, minimum registrations, add/drop deadlines, office hours, academic offences, and formal course evaluations – areas that are typically the domain of faculty. Our UL has learned to walk in the shoes of the Deans by managing part-time instructors, navigating academic appeals, and organizing teaching

schedules over multiple years. We regularly attend registration and orientation events, meet with students and their parents, and provide promotional material on the course to academic advisors. The Library now has the added status of a teaching department, and with it, greater involvement in campus-wide curriculum discussions and participation in teaching initiatives. While we may have been invited to sit at some of these tables in the past, there is a new vigor to these meetings with librarians now viewed as fully contributing teachers, rather than mere guest lecturers or research service providers.

Reflecting on the development of our IL credit course, we have gained some insights into some of the conditions that aided our success. Our University Librarian was fulfilling a key responsibility of her job, which as an administrator was to find the strengths of her staff and empower them to do their best work. We were given time to not just develop and teach the course, but also *acclimatize* to a new workload. This requires great respect and understanding for the practice of teaching, and faith in one's staff to carry it out well. Added to this was the fact that the course grew to be a Library-wide goal and therefore a priority. Not everyone needs to be a course champion, but there must be two or three key players to keep momentum going. The work involved in getting an information literacy credit course off the ground has worthwhile outcomes for students and librarians alike. We hope fully weighted credit courses in information literacy will one day be the norm at all universities and colleges.

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