Chapter 37

State University of New York at Plattsburgh

Immersed in Teaching

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Population Served

The State University of New York (SUNY) Plattsburgh is a public comprehensive college with between 5,000 and 6,000 students. We are located in the northeast corner of the state, adjacent to Vermont and the Canadian province of Quebec. We have Lake Champlain to the east of us and the six-million-acre New York State Adirondack Park to our west.

Because we are a state institution, most of our students (89%) are from New York State. Our largest concentrations are from our local tri-county area (22%) and the greater New York City and Long Island region (28%).¹ We also have about 350 international students. Our students graduate with degrees from our School of Arts and Sciences (53%), School of Business and Economics (24%), and School of Education, Health and Human Services (21%); the final 2% of students graduate in Individual Studies.² We are focused on undergraduate education with a few master’s programs. We have a branch campus in Queensbury, New York, that offers BA and BS completion programs for students with two-year degrees, and we offer online completion programs for bachelor’s degrees in nursing and accounting.

Feinberg Library is part of the division of Library and Information Technology Services. We serve our main campus, branch campus, and online populations from our centrally located building on the Plattsburgh campus. The library also houses the main computer lab, Learning Center, advising office, three computer classrooms, Center for Teaching Excellence, and our One-Button Studio, a dedicated video-recording space with green
screen using Pennsylvania State University’s One Button app to simplify video production for our faculty and students.

Our students come to us with a wide range of information literacy skills. This variability is likely related to if students had library media specialists in their schools or if they came to us as transfer students from other colleges. In the librarians’ meetings where we talk about our teaching, we have anecdotally noted that since New York State implemented the Common Core State Standards for K–12, students are coming into college having had less research, writing, and citation experience than in the past.

**Program Scope**

The cornerstone of our library instruction program is a one-credit general education course, a requirement for students since 1979. The course has gone through several teaching format and student learning outcome revisions over the years. We are currently offering the LIB200: Critical Research Skills course in on-campus, hybrid, and online sections in a five-week format. In addition, we offer a couple of online sections in the summer and winter sessions. Class size is generally twenty-five seats per section. We teach over 1,000 students a year in our course (see Table 37.1).

While most of our LIB200 sections are general in nature, meaning the course content is appropriate for any major, over the years we have worked with different departments, groups, and individuals on campus to provide integrated or discipline-specific sections. Most recently we have been offering science and history sections for incoming students in the fall semesters who have declared these majors. We have a section tied to one of the Expeditionary Studies program courses so students are taking both courses together outside of our usual five-week schedule. Expeditionary Studies majors have an outdoor adventure sports curriculum of hiking, kayaking, and ice climbing and tend to need classes that can work around a schedule where they can be off-campus for weeks at a time. We have worked with the nursing program to have both its online and branch campus RN-to-BS students take our course as a program requirement via a dedicated online section. In the past, we have also worked with campus learning communities and our Educational Opportunity Program, a New York State–funded program providing support for students who, while having potential, might not have otherwise been admitted to college.

We provide a proficiency exam option so students who have already developed research skills can test out of the course. The exam initially was used when the library course first became a requirement because there were too many students for the number of seats that could be offered. Now, if a student passes the exam, they meet the requirement but do not earn the credit hour. The exam has the reputation of being difficult to pass, and over the years we have worked hard to develop it into a reliable instrument to ensure that those passing the exam do have the appropriate level of skill. The pass rate for the exam for the past couple of years has been around 50 percent. There is no penalty or letter grade that goes on a student’s transcript if they do not pass, so we do get a number of students taking the exam as a bit of a gamble just to see if they can test out of the course. The exams are held the Sunday before each semester starts and again during the academic advising period when students are building or adjusting their course schedules.
Along with the course and exam, we offer one-shot course-related sessions as requested by faculty. While our credit course is a general introduction to doing college-level research, our one-shot library sessions allow us to work with students with particular discipline-specific research needs. We average between fifty and sixty sessions each semester. We work with everything from first-semester composition to senior capstone courses and a few graduate-level courses. The majority of requests come from faculty in the School of Arts and Sciences (64%), followed by the School of Education, Health and Human Services (31%). A majority (58%) of our one-shot sessions are for upper-level courses, and 13 percent of our requests are for teaching students to use Zotero, an online bibliographic collection and citation tool. We have also been branching out and doing live, real-time online sessions with our branch campus, using tools like Google Hangouts or Zoom, and creating videos for online courses. Occasionally, we accommodate visits from local high school classes with tours and research sessions during college breaks.

Table 37.1
Summary of Feinberg Library instruction program services for the 2017-18 academic year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2017–18</th>
<th>Sections/Sessions</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIB200</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>1,131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-Shots</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>2,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIB Exam</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Operations

Our ten full-time librarians are tenured or tenure-track faculty with twelve-month appointments, with one exception—our Systems Librarian is on a professional line, which means he has a continuing appointment, but without the obligation of doing scholarship. All full-time librarians teach the credit course. The typical teaching obligation is two sections of the course per semester. We also employ adjunct librarians to teach a few sections. Our adjuncts are all librarians with MLS/MLIS degrees; most are library media specialists who work in local schools.

The LIB200 Course Coordinator position is assigned by the dean, is formally acknowledged with a three-year contract, and receives half of the Library Faculty Chair stipend for doing the academic work of the department: scheduling courses and working with the librarians, faculty, students, the registrar’s office, and the advising office. The librarian elected as the Library Faculty Chair also gets a three-year contact, the other half of the stipend, and a one-course reduction. The chair position is responsible for holding departmental meetings and writing performance review letters. The chair position is seen as a shared service responsibility for senior members of the department, and many of us have served. In contrast the LIB200 Course Coordinator position is an individual workload responsibility.

Librarians are divided into two operational units: the Collection Development and Delivery (CD&D) unit with three full-time librarians (including the Systems Librarian)
and one part-time librarian cataloger, and the Instruction and Reference Services (IRS) unit with seven full-time librarians. Only the IRS unit librarians teach one-shot sessions. While we have a library liaison program and we try to match the appropriate librarian to courses in their liaison areas, it is not always possible. The CD&D librarians who are liaisons do not teach one-shots. And of course sometimes IRS librarians’ schedules do not line up with the course requests from their departments.

While we have a librarian designated as the one-shot coordinator who receives the requests sent through our online request form, many librarians are contacted directly by faculty and simply notify the coordinator, who keeps the statistics for one-shot instruction. All librarians have an individual workload document that is reviewed annually with our supervisor, the dean. In the workload document, the number of one-shot sessions is not uniform for librarians and generally ranges from five to ten sessions per semester, based in part on our other work obligations. We do have a history of agreeing to teach additional sessions, as we have developed good relationships with faculty and we don’t want to decline offers to teach sessions for them.

The LIB200 course gets priority scheduling in one of the computer classrooms in the library. If there is space in the schedule after our course is entered, other classes get scheduled there by the registrar’s office. In contrast, the one-shot sessions do not have a dedicated space. Occasionally the class is already in a computer classroom, but in many cases the one-shot coordinator needs to work with the registrar’s office to see if a computer classroom of an appropriate size is available at the requested days and times. Our preference is to have computer classrooms so that we can provide students with hands-on learning. When computer classrooms are unavailable, we have tried to come up with ways to make the sessions as interactive as possible to keep students engaged.

Marketing

Marketing efforts for the credit course are minimal, as it is a requirement and we have support from faculty and staff advisors who value the course and know that students should take it sooner rather than later. Librarians teaching subject-specific sections typically work with the chairs in those departments to ensure the students get enrolled in the correct sections. In the past we had to promote our summer and winter session classes, but in recent years these have filled up very quickly so simply sending an email reminder to students has been sufficient.

The course proficiency exam is less well known and is offered only a few times during the semester. In the past we have posted signs in the library, the college center, the advising office, and the dorms to remind students of the exam and how to register for it. But we discovered that most students found it easier to use the registration links we provided in emails, so the paper signs have been discontinued.

For our one-shot sessions, we largely rely on librarians contacting their liaison departments and reminding them at the beginning of the semesters about scheduling library instruction sections. In addition, many of our sessions are recurring requests, where faculty contact us automatically every semester, so we typically don’t do any additional promotion for this service.
Collaboration

As much as having a required stand-alone course indicates that information literacy is valued on our campus, it also can sometimes mean that other faculty don’t have to think about it as often. Particularly when campus program revisions are being made, information literacy can sometimes be overlooked. Being and staying in the general education program is a priority for us, so we always have a librarian serving on the campus general education committee. I also serve on the Campus Assessment Advisory Committee. In 2018, I chaired the committee that revised our Campus Institutional Student Learning Outcomes, which I am happy to say continue to include information literacy. We generally try to have a librarian on all the major campus committees; it is a great way to stay informed about what is happening on campus, and it is another way to interact face-to-face with other faculty and staff outside the library. Most campus committees are open to any who want to volunteer to serve on them. The librarians generally have a discussion when the call for volunteers comes out each year to see who is serving on what committees and see if there are any gaps.

In other small ways, we try to integrate the library into other faculty or campus events. For example, during the new faculty campus orientation, the library hosts a wine and cheese reception so new faculty actually come to the library and can meet the librarians. We also host a Celebration of Scholarship event each year in the library, which celebrates and displays the faculty’s scholarship from the previous year.

Assessment

Our credit course LIB200, as part of the campus general education program, is included in ongoing student learning outcomes assessment. We have data going back to 2003, although the methods and assessment instruments have changed significantly over time. The current method, started in fall 2017, involves librarians taking a random sample of five students per class and using a shared rubric to score an assignment whose outcomes have been mapped to the LIB200 course outcomes. The rubrics on campus all use the same scoring method: Mastery (3 points), Accomplished (2 points), Developing (1 point), and Beginning (0 points).

The assessment data we collect gets used in a couple of different ways. To meet the requirements for our general education assessment, we map our more specific LIB200 outcomes to the three broader outcomes provided by SUNY. The SUNY outcomes are “perform basic operations of computer use; understand and use basic research techniques; and locate, evaluate and synthesize information from a variety of sources.” Results for all general education categories are presented in an online dashboard that is available to the campus.

Currently the LIB200 course is the only course in the Information Management general education category. The dashboard (see figure 37.1) provides each semester’s average scores for the three SUNY outcomes and the number of students with average scores in each of the rubric’s four levels.
To make the data more useful for librarians, as the course coordinator I set up a separate dashboard for our internal use (see figure 37.2) that provides the full list of course outcomes and the average scores for each. We can delve deeper into the data and scores for the specific skills and knowledge we are trying to teach.

**Figure 37.1**
General education assessment dashboard for Information Management

**Figure 37.2**
LIB200 outcomes assessment average scores for 2017–18
Our focus for the data we are collecting is to help us generate discussion about those areas that could use improvement. The librarians have at least one or two “talking about teaching” meetings a year to share what we are struggling with and discuss new ideas or pedagogical approaches that we have tried recently.

Along with outcomes assessment, we use our own customized student course evaluation survey for LIB200. This asks students about the content of the course, the instructor’s effectiveness, and the teaching methods used. The data from this survey is included in our “effectiveness in teaching” section of our performance review files for contract renewals, promotions, and tenure. There is a general course opinion survey the campus makes available to all faculty, but all departments and instructors can work with their own instrument if they want to develop one. Given the skills-based and active learning pedagogy we work with, we have found we can get more relevant feedback from students using our own survey.

For our one-shot classes, we use a student evaluation survey at the end of the session. As the same survey is used for all sessions, the questions are pretty generic in wording and ask if students have an improved understanding of the content covered, if the librarian presented the information clearly, and if the librarian effectively addressed their questions. Three weeks after the one-shot, a follow-up survey is sent to faculty asking how the students made use of the information and skills covered in the session. For the 2017–18 year, 88 percent of faculty respondents indicated improved quality of student assignments, while the remaining 12 percent indicated it was too soon to tell.

Role of the One-Shot

Programmatically, one-shots are a good and needed complement to our credit course. In one-shot sessions we are able to address the subject- or assignment-specific needs of students. We can cover particular tools or resources within the context students will need them; for example, showing journalism students how to find data sources for newspaper stories or showing chemistry students how journals are ranked in their field. A one-credit course is simply not adequate to address all the various information needs our students have.

One-shot library sessions are also a valuable tool for connecting and working with faculty. While we try through our library liaison program to do outreach, one-shots are an opportunity to be face-to-face with faculty. During one-shots, faculty regularly ask us their own questions about research when we visit with their classes.

We have been branching out from our usual live, in-person library sessions. Last year, we experimented with creating an instruction video for an online anthropology course, with very favorable feedback from the instructor. We also held a few live, online one-shots using Google Hangouts and Zoom to work with business and nursing classes at our branch campus. And a new chemistry professor this year asked to record and post an audio file of our of our library session with her class on her course site.

There have been times when we have struggled with balancing our workload and meeting all the requests for one-shot sessions, but so far we have been able to keep up with demand. Perhaps one of the most taxing issues is that a majority of our one-shot requests come at the same time we are teaching our own course, typically the first few weeks in the
semester. We have not come up with a particular strategy to address this, but when possible we try not to overcommit ourselves with service or committee work early in the semester.

Pedagogical Highlights

Given our library’s long history with library instruction, it is not surprising that we have had ties to broader initiatives around information literacy. Our former Dean of Library and Information Technology Services was one of the founders and champions for the Association of College and Research Libraries’ Information Literacy Immersion Program. In fact, SUNY Plattsburgh hosted the very first Immersion Program in July 1999. The result is that all of our full-time librarians have attended at least one Immersion Program, and a few of us have attended more than one. Because of this, we have a shared base of knowledge for both information literacy and pedagogy that enables us to have productive discussions about teaching and learning.

For the LIB200 course, we designed a single set of student learning outcomes, but we have the pedagogical freedom for each librarian to approach sections of the course in their own way. When we updated our course outcomes about four years ago, the librarians working on the revisions drafted course outlines that included sample resources and activities. These sample outlines were then shared with all teaching librarians as starting points that librarians could then adapt or revise.

This model provides flexibility that enables us to customize our sections, whether they are discipline-specific or general, with students still achieving the same outcomes. For example, whether a librarian is teaching a section for science majors or a general section that is exploring diversity issues in higher education, we know that all students in these sections will meet the course outcome “to select appropriate search tools in order to access the type of information sought.”

Administrative Highlights

I am proud of the way we can accommodate opportunities for our librarians to work with other faculty through learning communities, cross-listed courses, or discipline-specific sections in our credit course. Some of these courses follow our current five-week format, but in some cases we have deviated from our course schedule to make the partnership work. For example, in some cases, the courses start at different times in the semester than our regular sections, while others have been scheduled to meet every few weeks the whole semester long. We successfully work with the registrar’s office and department chairs to make these sessions happen.

It is challenging to keep librarians engaged and excited about teaching since we do so much of it. We have used a teaching rotation to allow librarians an occasional semester off from teaching the credit course. Librarians are encouraged to use that time to make revisions to their course or work on other library projects. Originally, our rotation happened every three semesters, but with a reduction in the number of librarians over the years, our current rotation is set so that a librarian is off once every six semesters.
Information Literacy Coordinator Profile

My professional focus, even before I got to graduate school, was on being an instruction librarian in an academic library, so taking on instruction coordination responsibilities was a natural progression for me. It likely helped that shortly before my arrival, Feinberg Library had moved to a flat reporting structure, meaning that rather than having a head or supervisor for an area, we had coordinators who were not permanently assigned. This allowed librarians to focus on chosen areas of service or expertise. I have now served as the course coordinator for over fifteen years and began coordinating our proficiency exam the first year I started at Feinberg Library.

What I Wish People Knew

As all our full-time librarians teach, everyone has strong opinions about anything to do with our instruction program. When issues come up or revisions are discussed, tensions can run pretty high as these changes can affect our daily work life in significant ways. I have discovered that in both our department and our campus culture, the least effective approach is to come up with a new plan or idea and present it to the group. It will get ripped to shreds, and all doubts, complaints, and cynicism will come out. It is times like these that it is good to take a step back and realize that (hopefully) this reaction is not out of spite, but because your coworkers also care a great deal about these issues.

Within the library, years ago, I recall a proposal that was put forward about changing our priorities and scheduling for our one-shot sessions. The plan seemed like a needed and logical change to those who came up with the idea, but they were instead shocked by the dissent it generated when brought to the library faculty. While it was eventually worked out, it generated some short-term tensions and brought up larger issues around what we view as our professional obligations.

I have found that any new idea or revision process really benefits from several preliminary individual conversations before presenting any new idea to a group. I know to start conversations with a few individuals to help gauge general support, identify concerns or questions, and perhaps most importantly let my colleagues know what I am thinking and get some understanding of their positions. In particular, I have found it helpful to seek out those who have voiced concerns or dissent on previous ideas.

This method for moving ideas forward was reinforced for me when I attended an assessment conference a few years ago, where some administrators were talking about trying to get something approved at the campus level. They explained that they went into that meeting knowing a vast majority would approve their plan because they took the time to have individual conversations and were able to address any concerns. Not all new ideas will succeed, or perhaps not move out of beta testing, but it is immensely important that the services, methods, and outcomes in instruction programs be reviewed, updated, and improved upon to stay relevant. Understanding the dynamics of your library, department, and culture can go a long way in moving things forward.
Notes


Bibliography

