Prepare, partner, protest, propose, and persevere: Advocating for a dedicated information literacy classroom

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The circumstances leading to advocating for a classroom

In 2011, SUNY Oneonta began planning for the partial renovation of the James M. Milne Library to accommodate three offices and their staff: the tutoring center, accessibility resources office, and the faculty center. In the initial planning stages, there was no discussion of the inclusion of dedicated information literacy classrooms.

In 2017, SUNY Oneonta's Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs created a policy that granted the College Registrar priority to schedule semester-long classes in the Library's two computer equipped classrooms to commence in the Fall 2018 semester.

In 2018, the partial renovation of Milne Library was completed. The remodeled building was touted as student-centered and conducive to learning.

In the Fall 2018, Spring 2019, and Fall 2019 semesters, instruction librarians were forced to schedule nearly 25% of information literacy sessions in classrooms located outside the Library and unequipped with computers. Students in the information literacy classes held outside the Library were denied opportunities for hands-on learning and engagement with library collections, services, and spaces.
The five-point advocacy strategy

Point 1. *Prepare* evidence to present to decision makers

Librarians collected evidence to demonstrate the detrimental impact of the scheduling policy on the classroom and the lack of alignment with best practices. Librarians distributed the evidence to key decision makers and stakeholders including the Provost, Associate Provost for Academic Services, Vice President for Facilities Planning, Library Director, College Registrar, Library Partial Renovation Steering Committee, and information technology staff. When the College recruited a new Provost and Library Director in the summer of 2019, librarians updated the evidence and sent it to the new administrators.

Librarians prepared statistical charts showing the number of information literacy classes scheduled and location of those classes. The statistics showed that the number of classes scheduled outside the library was approaching 25% since the inception of the new policy.
Librarians collected statements from the literature and organizations that offer guidelines and best practices for the provision of high-quality, dedicated classroom space for library instruction. Statements were gathered from organizations such as the Association of College and Research Libraries and the College's accrediting agency, Middle States Commission on Higher Education. The College's policy of giving the Registrar priority over the Library’s instructional spaces did not align with the guidelines and best practices.
Librarians surveyed other libraries to determine how many have dedicated information literacy classrooms located in the library and who is responsible for scheduling the classroom. Sixty-six individuals responded to the survey. The results of the survey indicated that 94% of respondents had a dedicated information literacy classroom located in the library. Additionally, 89% of respondents reported that library staff were responsible for scheduling the classroom.

**Point 2. Partner with campus allies who will advocate for the library**

The Library’s most significant allies were the Library Committee and individual faculty for whom librarians taught information literacy classes.

Librarians asked eleven faculty to write testimonials to the Provost about the importance of having a dedicated information literacy classroom with adequate computers. All eleven faculty wrote detailed testimonials.

Librarians brought the issue of the classroom to the Library Committee. The Library Committee is a part of shared governance at SUNY Oneonta. The role of the Committee is to "assist the Library Director and College Library Faculty in guiding the development and growth of the College library, in formulating policy for use of the library, and in allocating library funds to be spent in academic areas" (College Senate, 2013).

In 2016, the Library Committee unanimously passed a resolution to recommend to the Library Partial Renovation Steering Committee "to maintain adequate and dedicated classrooms for library and library approved instruction, and for two computer equipped classrooms with capacities of 60 and 25 seats each" (Library Committee, 2016).

In 2020, the Library Committee unanimously passed a resolution "to return scheduling control of the instructional spaces located in Milne Library to Librarians and Library Staff" (Library Committee, 2020).
The Library Committee will ask the Senate to endorse the following motions:

**Motion 1, passed March 14, 2016**
"The Library Committee recommends the inclusion of a Faculty Center within the Library in close proximity to the TLTC, as currently proposed by the Committee on Instruction proposal. The Library Committee recommends the development of a clear plan for how shared space for instruction, meetings and presentations will be managed and coordinated on a day-to-day basis within the library facility, so that the overlapping of shared space use by stakeholders housed in the library will not infringe on or reduce current library services and instruction."

**Motion 2, passed April 25, 2016**
"Whereas Recommendations from the College Library Committee Based on Focus Group Interviews with Faculty, Staff, and Students, Conducted April 2-15, 2015 was endorsed unanimously, as amended, by the College Senate on December 7, 2015;

Whereas the Recommendations from the College Library Committee Based on Focus Group Interviews with Faculty, Staff, and Students, Conducted April 2-15, 2015 includes the following:

"Encourage the development of physical space in the library that is conducive to enrich the academic experience of students. These may include the following: Adequate and dedicated classrooms for library instruction"

Be it resolved that the College Library Committee recommend to the Library Partial Renovation Steering Committee that the following spaces be included in the library renovation plan:

**One large computer-equipped classroom (60 seats)** dedicated to library instruction and other library-approved instruction, including IT Services workshops, library research classes conducted by teaching faculty, campus workshops for computer applications such as Business Intelligence and ARGOS, and Faculty Center workshops and practice of experimental pedagogy.

**One small computer-equipped classroom (25 seats)** dedicated to library instruction and other library-approved instruction, including IT Services workshops, library research classes conducted by teaching faculty, campus workshops for computer applications such as Business Intelligence and ARGOS, and Faculty Center workshops and practice of experimental pedagogy.
Point 3. Protest in public spaces to raise awareness

Librarians advocated for information literacy classrooms in the College Senate, the most public space on campus for discussion of matters related to the educational mission of the college.
The College Senate "is the representative body through which faculty, staff, and students participate in shared governance and college affairs at SUNY Oneonta. It provides a forum for the campus community to participate in the initiation, development, and implementation of the educational mission of the college. The College Senate is empowered to act for SUNY Oneonta faculty in all matters, procedures, and prerogatives in its meetings" (College Senate, 2020).

When the Chair of the Library Committee brought the resolutions to the College Senate in 2016 and 2020, librarians were able to raise concerns and awareness about the Library’s classrooms in a forum that includes representatives from all academic departments and professional programs, the College President, the President of the Student Association, and student representatives.

The Senate unanimously endorsed the resolution regarding maintaining adequate and dedicated classrooms for library and library approved instruction.

The Senate decided to postpone voting on the resolution regarding scheduling of the classrooms in the Library pending the completion a study of space resources and allocation being conducted by the College.

By advocating in the College Senate, librarians brought the issue of the Library’s classrooms to the broader campus community.

**Point 4. Propose solutions to decision makers**

Librarians proposed solutions to demonstrate that we are problem solvers, collaborative, and flexible as well as advocates. Librarians made the following suggestions to address the problem:

- Repurpose a large boardroom as a flexible learning space and providing students with laptops.
- Enlarge the library 20 computer classroom to accommodate more computers and students.
- Move the computers from the 20 person classroom to another space that could accommodate more computers and students.
- Give the Library the opportunity to book the large classroom before the Registrar begins it for semester-long classes.
- Repurpose office space in the Library and use as a classroom.
"Point 5. Persevere in your advocacy efforts"

"It's a marathon, not a sprint"

"There is a reason why we use the phrase 'It's a marathon, not a sprint' when talking about advocacy. A sprint in advocacy equals a short-term result; a marathon involves a long-lasting result" (Cline, et. al. 2018).

Cline, Norton and Merola's statement is very applicable to the Milne Library example. Milne librarians advocated for information literacy classrooms for nearly ten years before achieving what is hopefully a long-lasting result to increase the number of information literacy classes in the Library's instructional spaces.
The results of the advocacy work

In 2016, the Library Partial Renovation Steering Committee agreed to include information literacy classrooms in the renovation planning.

In 2017, College administration acknowledged that the lack of adequate space for information literacy instruction was "a campus problem." Consequently, space in an academic building was renovated to create another large capacity computer equipped classroom to take some of the pressure off the classroom in the Library.

In 2019, librarians continued to raise unresolved issues about the classroom to the new Library Director. For example, an increase in student enrollment resulted in more demand for large computer equipped classrooms. As a result, in the Fall 2019 semester, scheduling of semester-long classes in the Library precluded the offering of information literacy classes for almost the entirety of two days out of the regular five-day teaching schedule. The Library's new Director agreed to raise librarians’ concerns with the new Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Library Committee.

In April 2020, the College approved a project to enlarge the smaller classroom to a 40-person capacity and to add six computers to the room for a total of 26; however, amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the project is currently on hold.
Please share your advocacy story

This is an anonymous survey to offer conference participants the opportunity to share advocacy experiences. Participants can see the results of the survey by clicking on the link after the survey. The survey may take a few moments to load. Thank you for participating!

Please click here to see the results of the survey.

Works Cited


Library Committee (2020). Motion to return scheduling control of the instructional spaces located in Milne Library to librarians and library staff.