Promoting Embedded Librarianship Programs

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Abstract

A growing trend at colleges and universities is academic librarians co-teaching alongside content faculty. Co-teaching librarians are often referred to as embedded librarians. This paper uses research-based evidence to support the claim that embedded academic librarians in college and university courses are beneficial and that embedded librarianship programs should be promoted at colleges and universities as a means to attain institutional effectiveness. A three-step action plan is suggested to identify how academic librarians can promote and market embedded librarianship programs.

Keywords: academic libraries, embedded librarian, interdisciplinary co-teaching

Promoting Embedded Librarianship Programs

An academic librarian's traditional role as the primary source of information is in flux as new technology allows university and college faculty and students to access information without ever stepping into a library. Further, academic librarians are under pressure from institutional effectiveness administrators to demonstrate the value and continued relevance of library services. Librarians are countering this pressure through embedded librarianship.

Shumaker (2009) defined embedded librarianship as "a distinctive innovation that moves librarians out of libraries and creates a new model of library and information work" (p. 25). Embedded librarians are often compared to embedded journalists; librarians are embedded into an academic course and are in the *trenches* alongside the content faculty and students. Embedded librarians develop working relationships with content faculty and strive to understand students' needs. The embedded librarian is then better able to determine what material and services are needed in the course. Although many academic librarians are readily available and willing to assist in the classroom or online course, content faculty and students often do not seek out or know of this service.

The Association of College and Research Libraries (2016) reported "libraries are finding that partnerships with other campus units are yielding promising benefits" (p. 13). This included improvements in students' research and information literacy skills. Librarian collaboration, such as when a librarian is embedded in the college or university physical or virtual classroom, is an effective method to facilitate student learning. What can academic librarians do to promote embedded librarianship programs at academic institutions? The evidence-based studies identified and discussed below illustrate how collaborations between librarians and content faculty have shown to improve student learning and how librarians can promote collaboration among college

and university educators through embedded programs. This claim is supported by several recent studies that address the value of embedded programs and how the programs are promoted at academic institutions. These studies inform my recommended three-step action plan articulated in this article to promote embedded librarianship programs.

Evidence-based Research about Promoting Embedded Programs

Blake et al. (2016) reported findings from a survey distributed to 4,000 students, faculty, and clinicians. The web-based survey measured awareness and perception of an embedded librarianship program on a health sciences campus. Of the 4,000, only 381 responded to the survey. Out of the entire respondents, 58% reported being aware of the embedded program. Of the faculty aware of the program, 95.3% agreed or strongly agreed that the librarians were "an integral part of their groups" (p. 228). Of the students aware of the program, 94% agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the librarians' services, and 84% agreed or strongly agreed they would seek out the librarians' help again. Although awareness of the program was limited, a significant portion of those who knew of the program responded positively.

Blake et al. (2016) recognized limitations in the survey, including the small response rate and sample pool. They also identified two areas within the program needing improvement— awareness and perceived value of the embedded librarians' services. They concluded that there was a need for the embedded librarians to "work harder to promote themselves and the range of services that they provided through the embedded program" (p. 229).

Embedded programs are available not only on academic campuses but also online. Allen (2017) assessed how a small, private liberal arts university developed an online embedded program. Traditional library support could not keep up the university's rapid growth of online programs. Allen addressed how the university handled the problem by hiring a full-time "Online

Instruction Librarian" (p. 254) and by developing a "comprehensive plan for online embedded librarianship" (p. 254). Allen's assessment of the program identified key actions taken to market and implement a successful program. He also provided a valuable guide for other academic librarians beginning their own online embedded programs.

Schulte, Tiffen, Edwards, Abbott, and Luca (2018) reported findings of an undergraduate course that was redeveloped to include an embedded librarian. The redevelopment was intended to create a "more authentic and engaging learning experiences" (p. 685) for students. An embedded librarian assisted student to do research and to publish in a peer-reviewed eJournal. Schulte et al. found that the librarians involved in the course utilized skills that included more than just traditional information literacy. The librarians utilized scholarly communication, digital literacy, and publishing knowledge during the course. Student feedback collected during focus groups indicated that the students felt they were better prepared for future employment tasks. The librarians involved reported feeling satisfied by being able to use skill sets too often not used in the library. Schulte et al. found that the study confirmed "the role of the librarian is evolving to meet the requirements of pedagogical changes" (p. 686). Librarians met the needs of the faculty and students, resulting in a successful partnership.

Vetter (2014) reported on a pilot study for a librarian embedded in a junior-level composition course. Vetter, the course faculty, was approached by the librarian to form a partnership for a specific assignment. The assignment asked students to research a local topic, write an article, and publish their work on an online forum (Wikipedia). A qualitative method, open-ended questionnaire was given to students at the end of the assignment. Students expressed feeling more confident about conducting research and using library material. They also expressed developing close working relationships with the librarian and plans to consult the

librarian in the future. Vetter acknowledged that the study was limited by size and there was no

control group. Vetter proposed that his study described a successful example of a cross-

disciplinary pedagogy that addressed student research, writing, and digital literacy.

        The case studies discussed above indicate that embedded librarianship programs are often

isolated, one-time events. Networking and marketing are solutions to this problem. Booker and

Bandyopadhyay (2013) conducted a study at an urban Midwestern university's library to collect

and analysis data on how a library utilized social networking sites in marketing library services.

They also outlined "strategies that libraries can use to maximize their marketing efforts" (p. 130).

Out of the 164 patrons surveyed, 138 were students, 16 were staff, and 10 were community

members. Respondents reported using Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter the most. Of the

respondents, 86% rated it important for the library to use social networking. For respondents

under the age of 35, the library's website was the most preferred mode of information. Only

patrons using the physical library were surveyed, limiting the scope of the study. However, from

the results, Booker and Bandyopadhyay noted that physical patrons' needs would certainly differ

from online patrons' needs. Even with this limitation, these researchers concluded that the

library's website and use of social networking sites are effective ways to network and market

library services and activities.

Leading Change to Promote Embedded Librarian Services

        The embedded librarianship programs discussed in the section above demonstrates how

some academic librarians are using and marketing their skills and services in new ways to

promote institutional effectiveness in universities and colleges. Yet, everyone who shares

responsibility for student learning at an academic institution does not always recognize

embedded librarianship programs as essential for learning. Academic librarians can to do more to

draw attention to embedded librarianship programs. Based on current research-based evidence discussed in this essay, I offer a three-step action plan to improve academic librarians' visibility and to promote embedded librarianship programs.

Step One, Develop a Strategic Proposal

Develop a strategic proposal to garner awareness. Allen (2017) defined a proposal as articulating "a scalable, sustainable plan for embedded librarianship in online courses...[it] outlines the overarching objectives of the plan, lists courses for an embedded presence, and discusses how to measure the effectiveness of the plan" (p. 251). A proposal such as the one described by Allen is likely to be useful to clarify how an embedded librarianship program can be used in traditional and online courses

Librarians must consider the resources they have available to commit to an embedded librarianship program. The proposal will clarify what skills and resources a librarian will bring to a course as well as a librarian's expectations for the partnership with the content faculty. Shumaker (2009) suggested that librarians assess their readiness by "piloting, reviewing, revising, and gradually expanding are probably the steps on the road to success" (p. 241). Librarians will make mistakes but having a plan to assess what resources they have at their disposal (such as budget, space, administration support, and assessment strategies) will help ensure success.

Each embedded librarianship program will look different based on a library's available resources, and faculty and students' needs. Taking the time and effort to explain what the embedded librarianship program is, how the librarian is available to assist, and the program's benefits can garner awareness and support.

Step Two, Reach Out to Course Faculty

Reach out to content faculty to create a successful co-teaching partnership. A successful program depends on academic librarians and faculty working together. Yet, many faculty are weary to allow another faculty member into their classroom. Embedded librarians must strive to reach out to content faculty to discuss how an embedded program may be included into a course.

Shumaker and Talley (2009) identified a recurring action in successful embedded programs—the use of marketing and promotion. Embedded librarians reached out by ways of "word-of-mouth promotion; use of printed promotional materials such as brochures, flier, or posters; and, promotion through presentations at formal new-employee orientations" (p. 52). Other outreach methods include email and phone calls, serving on committees, targeting specific courses to help, and asking for feedback from both faculty and students (Allen, 2017).

In Schulte et al. (2018) and Vetter's (2017) studies, the librarians initiated contact with the content area faculty to offer his/her services. Vetter (2017) noted that students enjoyed the unique, dynamic nature of the assignment and expressed overall satisfaction. Schulte et al. (2018) noted that academic staff "reported professional development in terms of curriculum design, scaffolding of graduate attributes, and teaching communication skill" (p. 693). Both studies demonstrated positive outcomes resulting from a co-teaching partnership between content faculty and academic librarians.

Step Three, Utilize Social Media

Utilize social networking media to market embedded librarianship programs to faculty and students. Blake et al. (2016) reported that some respondents "expressed uncertainty over the extent of provided services… [and] indicated that increased advertising of embedded

services would be advantageous" (p. 229). Utilizing social media is a way to address this problem by providing specific details with no additional financial cost to the library.

According to Booker and Bandyopadhyay (2013), social media "provide libraries with many opportunities to communicate and market without much capital needed" (p. 145). Facebook and Twitter allow academic librarians to building relationships with students. YouTube can be a platform for posting online tutorials on how an embedded librarianship program can be encompassed into a course. LinkedIn can be used to network with faculty. Before dedicating time and money to a variety of networking sites, librarians should consider a strategy to determine which sites are the best fit for their institution (Booker & Bandyopadhyay, 2013). This electronic marketing strategy will prevent wasting time and effort.

Conclusions and Suggestions for Practice

Evidence-based research has shown that embedded academic librarians bring valuable skills and resources to traditional and online college and university courses. For an embedded librarianship program to be successful, academic librarians first need to take steps to promote the program at their institutions. By shifting traditional views of librarianship, embedded librarians can become co-teaching partners with content faculty and students. Academic librarians also can tailor services to fit content faculty and students' needs. There are challenges to promoting embedded librarianship programs. Lack of support from content faculty and/or administrators, limited library resources, and lack of motivation among academic librarians are just a few challenges to be mitigated.

Researchers still have a long way to go to develop qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research methods to assess fully embedded librarianship program effectiveness in the context of college and university effectiveness. Yet, many academic librarians are continuing to initiate a

change away from traditional library services to innovative library services. "It's that the very nature of our [librarians] service, and the relationship we have with our customers, changes—or can change, and must change—when we start roaming" (Shumaker, 2009, p. 240). Embedded librarianship is an effective tool for academic librarians to use in their work with content faculty and students. For librarians ready to step out of the academic library (either physically or virtually), my three-step plan identifies ways to promote and market an embedded librarianship program. Based on research-based evidence and my experiences, I believe that academic librarians should continue to promote and support embedded librarianship programs that lead to successful partnerships among educators and improve students' learning and academic success.

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