



## Chapter 39

# University of Maryland, Baltimore County

## Building Relationships at a Public Research University

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### Population Served

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), is a mid-sized public research university and is the third-largest institution in the twelve-member University System of Maryland. Fall 2018 enrollment included 11,260 undergraduate and 2,507 graduate students.<sup>1</sup> The campus is in a suburban location just outside of Baltimore, Maryland. UMBC serves a diverse student population, including a sizable number of international students (5% of undergraduate students and 24% of graduate students).<sup>2</sup> The first-year undergraduate population is nearly evenly split between freshmen and transfer students, with many of the transfer students coming from other Maryland universities or community colleges. Recognizing the diversity of student backgrounds and levels of experience using libraries, instruction librarians at UMBC work to design lesson plans and learning activities that provide opportunities for student learning and growth without requiring students to have previous experience with research. Within the classroom, librarians

acknowledge that doing library research can be difficult and frustrating and encourage students to take an active and engaged role in their learning and development. At the UMBC library, we aspire to create a comfortable and inclusive environment that takes into account the varied backgrounds of our students and provides a place of learning for all of them.

## Program Scope

### *Information Literacy Program*

The instruction program is overseen by the library's Instruction Coordinator as well as the Head of Reference and Instruction. All of the librarians and staff in the Reference and Instruction department, including the Instruction Coordinator, report directly to the Head of Reference and Instruction. The Instruction Coordinator guides long-term planning and assessment projects, as well as professional development and mentoring for teaching librarians. In addition, the coordinator generally monitors instruction throughout the course of the semester and addresses any instruction-related issues that emerge.

In 2015, all teaching librarians worked collaboratively to develop a set of programmatic learning outcomes based on the *ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* to use as a guide for lesson planning.<sup>3</sup> We have been using these outcomes as a foundation for a curriculum map, which shows which learning goals are being taught in which departments at UMBC.

The library's instruction program provides instruction for both undergraduate and graduate courses, with a large majority of sessions scheduled for undergraduate classes. The program operates primarily on a liaison model, with each librarian taking responsibility for approximately six or seven academic departments. Within each department, the liaison librarian is aware of what is been taught across the information literacy curriculum, though we are at the beginning of the aforementioned curriculum mapping project to formalize this scaffolding process further. Across the different disciplines, there may be some content repetition related to basic library navigation skills, but this occurs less frequently in classes that are tailored to address a particular assignment.

Some academic departments require a heavier teaching load than others, and we try to regularly review the instruction statistics to ensure that each librarian has only one or two high-frequency departments. For some librarians and their liaison departments, this proves more problematic. Such is the case for our humanities librarian and the workload of English 100, the introductory composition course. English 100 is the main cornerstone class for the library's instruction program and represents our best opportunity to work with most undergraduate students. There is no required course that is common to every student. Many students test out of the English 100 course or transfer in credit, so it is also not a guaranteed contact point, but through it we still reach a significant number of students. Currently, the humanities librarian is responsible for the English department as well as five other academic departments. There are often between twenty-five and forty-five sections of English 100 taught each semester, though at this time, only twenty to twenty-five request instruction sessions. We are experimenting with different modes of library instruction that would make this a sustainable undertaking. For now,

the humanities librarian teaches all of these classes, and we agreed to cap the number of sessions they would teach before asking other librarians to take some of these requests.

Liaison librarians usually do broad outreach to all instructors teaching courses during a given semester, with some emphasis on foundational or methods courses. Our established best practices ask teaching librarians to contact their departments each semester to encourage faculty to schedule library instruction sessions. Librarians send an email to departmental chairs or administrators and occasionally attend departmental meetings.

Currently, there is not a great demand for online sessions, but librarians will conduct virtual sessions upon request. When we do provide instruction online, it is typically through software available in Blackboard, the campus's learning management system. This is a potential area for growth, but since it is largely untested, librarians prefer to schedule in-person instruction when possible. In addition to in-class instruction, subject librarians provide support through research appointments, often scheduled through the library's website.

The library's instruction team also offers regular research-oriented workshops that are open to any UMBC student, staff member, or faculty member. These workshops focus on using citation management tools, designing research posters, conducting literature reviews, and other broad-based research topics. Additionally, our instruction program provides an extensive collection of video and text-based tutorials that can be used for asynchronous, point-of-need learning.

### ***First Year Experience Program***

The library instruction program is closely involved with the campus's first-year experience program, which includes smaller, discussion-based classes designed to orient new students to a university experience. New students are strongly encouraged by academic advisors to enroll in these one-to-three-credit courses, but they are not mandatory courses for any students. Librarians and administrators within the first-year experience program encourage instructors to schedule library instruction sessions for their classes, and in turn the library provides library orientation sessions, as described below, for many sections of these classes. There are several types of optional first-year experience classes offered on campus, and the library's orientation-style sessions are most commonly requested for Introduction to an Honors University, one-credit classes that are tied to a three-credit academic course. The goals of these one-credit courses focus on skills for academic success, campus resources, and career readiness. Separate sections of these classes are offered for both freshmen and transfer students.

The library's orientation sessions have different learning outcomes from the information literacy-focused instruction sessions. The learning outcomes are primarily centered on identifying different types of publications and how they might be used in research, as well as providing the students with an opportunity to navigate the library's layout. These sessions are currently taught by specialized staff and have a common lesson plan. Previously, they were divided up among the librarians according to liaison area.

### ***First-Year Seminar***

The first-year seminar is another type of course offered through the first-year experience program and is intended to provide a small class environment that focuses on a specific

topic. When requested, we teach information literacy sessions focused on a particular assignment for these classes.

The authors proposed, designed, and now teach one of these first-year seminar courses, which are offered for three credits. These courses are not required for students but are among several types of small classes geared toward first-year students that are offered and encouraged during new student orientation. The enrollment is capped at twenty students, and there are usually five to ten first-year seminars offered each semester. The seminar we teach is titled *The Information Diet*, and it introduces students to many elements of information literacy, including the reflective discovery and critique of information and the ways information is produced and valued.

## Operations

Reference and Instruction is its own department under the library's public services division, which also includes circulation and media as well as special collections. Teaching for the library's instruction program is primarily done by five reference librarians and one specialized reference staff person. Three to four additional librarians outside of the reference department provide instruction either as a subject librarian or as a special collections librarian. Subject assignments are sometimes tied directly to a position (a science librarian, for instance, is hired as a subject librarian for specific disciplines) and sometimes negotiated as staffing needs change. Overall, each subject librarian is responsible for providing service for approximately six to eight departments on campus. These responsibilities include providing all levels of library instruction (introductory classes through graduate classes), research consultations, and collection development.

The instruction program does not have a budget per se, but library administration has provided money from the overall budget for some increased staffing, as well as new furniture and technology for the library's classroom. The library's administration has supported small staffing increases as the number of instruction classes has increased. In one case, a part-time staff line was transferred from another department into the Reference and Instruction department to assist with desk and administrative work and to free up librarians to do more instruction. In another, when a nonteaching librarian left the library for another position, their position was converted to a teaching librarian position.

The goals of the library's instruction program mirror the language of the library's strategic plan, which includes a focus area for "Teaching and Learning." This section of the strategic plan has a specific goal to "Integrate information literacy into the UMBC curriculum" with supporting objectives that outline the need for robust staffing, library instructor development, and the promotion of course-integrated instruction.<sup>4</sup> Departmentally, Reference and Instruction chose to focus annual efforts on two components of the library's strategic plan, one of which is "Teaching and Learning." Together, we prioritized departmental projects that support the objectives outlined in the strategic plan. These projects range from creating greater partnerships (with the campus Writing Center, for example) to creating a library instruction best practices web page in order to create more timely and enriching instruction experiences.

Information literacy and library instruction are not specifically mentioned in the campus strategic plan, but information literacy is one of five functional competencies for the general education program on campus.

# Marketing

At the start of each semester, subject librarians send emails to instructors in their disciplines encouraging them to incorporate library instruction sessions into their classes. These emails provide links to the instruction calendar and a form to submit an instruction request. These messages may go to all faculty teaching a course in that discipline at that time, as determined by the campus schedule of classes, or sometimes just faculty we have worked with in the past. Instruction librarians work hard to strike a balance between encouraging one-shot instruction sessions and ensuring that those sessions are scheduled in a way that the librarian can prepare meaningful material that is tied to the course content. In addition, subject librarians are heavily involved in campus service and shared governance committees and often use these relationships to network for the library and its instruction program. Librarians make a point of connecting with faculty at campus events and through requested participation in faculty meetings and retreats. Additionally, librarians give presentations at new faculty orientations in order to highlight the library instruction program.

# Collaboration

Building relationships on campus is the most time-consuming, and also the most effective, method for librarians to help the instruction program grow. Staffing changes, within both the library's instruction program and academic departments, can greatly impact the program, as the close ties we develop with other departments are often based on strong relationships between one or two members within their staff. These relationships, built and strengthened over time, can't be quickly replaced. New librarians spend much of their first year meeting potential partners and cultivating relationships. This dependence on individual relationships is problematic for the program overall, and our librarians are always seeking new ways to form structural partnerships that won't fluctuate with staff turnover. One way we have found success has been to establish nonnegotiable curricular integration for information literacy workshops or instruction sessions that don't depend on staffing or relationships. In one department, the liaison librarian and a professor built a library session into a common syllabus for a new cornerstone course that was required for the major. Each semester, the class is taught by different professors, but they always schedule a library instruction session because the library's learning outcomes and content are included in the syllabus.

We aim to establish more partnerships that are structurally integrated within programs in order to maintain continuity despite staffing changes. Another example is a partnership with the Meyerhoff Scholars, a research-focused program that works to increase diversity in STEM fields.<sup>5</sup> Our science librarian meets with the first-year cohort as a whole to discuss foundational research skills and then scaffolds instruction for the second- and third-year cohorts by discipline. We also have a long-standing relationship with the McNair Scholars, another program that focuses on increasing research opportunities for first-generation college students and other underrepresented groups on campus.<sup>6</sup> For over ten years, librarians in our department have taught an eight-week course that is integrated into a research methods course required for each cohort of scholars. Due to recent changes in

the program, we have been working with the McNair administrators on campus to move the library modules online so the scholars can complete them as prework for the research methods course instead.

The Humanities Librarian and a library services specialist in Reference and Instruction are working together to strengthen partnerships with the English Language Institute (ELI), the campus center for English as a Second Language, as well as the campus Writing Center, which is located in the library. They partner with ELI to provide library instruction for two levels of English language learning that the center offers. Each semester, they contact the instructors who are currently teaching and offer to work with students on website navigation and research skills. They are working with the Writing Center to provide training for writing tutors and to encourage referrals between the two campus units. This partnership has grown in recent months, and we are investigating whether this collaboration can be further integrated with the classes we teach for the first-year experience program and English 100.

For faculty and staff, instruction librarians have presented and conducted workshops about teaching and learning through the campus Faculty Development Center and the provost's Teaching and Learning Symposium. Primarily, we have discussed and demonstrated information literacy activities that can be customized for a variety of course content. Recent presentations at the symposium have included active demonstrations of teaching activities related to the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy* and poster sessions that highlight our reflective teaching portfolios.

In 2018, the authors proposed and led a yearlong faculty learning community on campus that focused on cultivating critical thinking through course-integrated information literacy. This learning community investigated ways to introduce students to a reflective discovery and critique of information, an understanding of how information is produced and valued in our various disciplines, and an understanding of the use of information in creating new knowledge. Over the course of a year, the participants met to discuss issues related to information literacy in their classes. They worked to develop teaching activities or assessments that support students' abilities to critically evaluate information and in time will create workshops for other faculty on campus.

## Assessment

For the most part, the library's instruction program has been left out of conversations surrounding assessment on our campus. Even though one of our university's functional competencies for general education is information literacy, there aren't many courses that choose this competency as a focus for their class. We have worked with the Academic Engagement and Transition Program on a smaller project to collect data from students participating in first-year experience courses. Students in these courses answer questions related to using the library on a pre- and posttest, and initial evaluation shows that students in these courses who have participated in library instruction are better prepared to answer these questions about the library. The questions focus on library services, building and website navigation, and basic source evaluation. The students' understanding of these answers helps us shape the way we teach these orientation sessions. We are also able to use this data to advocate for instructors to schedule a session for their students since

we can point to evidence of student learning as compared to those who have not gone through the orientation.

Our instruction librarians are developing an assessment process that works for us. We can assume that we will eventually be asked to show the impact of our teaching and would like to develop strategies that make sense for our program. With that in mind, we are documenting our modes of assessment in an organized way so we may critically evaluate our teaching and how our students learn from it. In our classes, we often conduct formative assessment both to improve our teaching practices and to better understand how to help our students. We have hesitated to call this classroom assessment summative since we analyze only the learning done in our brief one-shot sessions and not how it is tied to a final project in the class. There may be opportunities in the future where we find this type of assessment appropriate, but currently, we think there are too many variables to untangle in order to directly tie library instruction to the outcomes of a particular project. We are focusing primarily on formative assessment to inform our reflective teaching practice.

We are also working to map our instruction sessions across the curriculum and align classes with the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy*. We plan to focus each year on collecting a set of artifacts in the fall semester that show work toward a particular frame and analyzing those artifacts with a common rubric in the spring semester. Fall 2018 is the first semester for this project, which is based on the assessment plan used at University of Maryland, College Park.<sup>7</sup>

## Role of the One-Shot

Currently, the one-shot is our main access point for students, and we haven't found a good way around this yet. There are some librarians who teach two-shots after negotiation with the course instructor. We recognize the limitations of this structure but maintain it primarily because we don't have the additional time and staffing needed to reimagine it.

## Pedagogical Highlights

In 2015, our department wrote programmatic learning outcomes based on the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy*, and we use these outcomes as a guide for structuring our teaching. As a group, we are moving toward more consistent use of active learning techniques and formative student assessment in the classroom. The program also has overarching instructional goals, and our classes focus primarily on helping students prepare for a particular research assignment (though we do see some classes for more generalized information literacy sessions). We compile general teaching activities that are tied to programmatic learning outcomes and use them to supplement assignment-driven sessions and provide content for those that aren't tied to an assignment. An example of a session that is not assignment-driven is taught for a 200-level psychology course that introduces students to the major. For that library session, the activities focus on reading magazine and newsletter articles that discuss psychological research. We analyze the language used to discuss the research in order to evaluate the findings and attempt to locate the original research study for comparison. These activities are designed to help students locate and evaluate psychological research, but also to think critically about sources they would be

likely to encounter on social media or other news-related sites. In comparison, an example of instruction in a 400-level class in this major focuses on finding one particular journal article of high quality to use for a class presentation. The learning activities for this session focus on using specific tools and databases for evaluation metrics and ask students to draw on their own research experience to create criteria for determining quality.

Our community of practice takes the shape of the Information Literacy Working Group (ILWG), an optional committee for library workers involved with instruction, whose structure is modified based on ongoing projects. Recently, we restructured ILWG and formed task groups that focus on projects and report out at our general meetings. These task groups are periodically evaluated for need and will disband if a project has been completed. Our current task groups include Learning Objects, Instructor Development, Instruction Assessment, and Collaborative Outreach. Currently, the Instructor Development task group is focused on creating opportunities for learning and growth for librarians. In addition to teach-arounds and workshops, the instruction librarians have participated in a number of article discussion groups over the last few years and are currently developing a specific discussion series on topics related to critical librarianship.

The Instructor Development group also manages our fledgling peer coaching program, which is based on librarian and instruction coordinator Dale Vidmar's model.<sup>8</sup> We implemented peer coaching instead of having the coordinator conduct observations for all of the instruction librarians. Neither the coordinator nor the teaching librarians were particularly comfortable with conducting teaching observations, and they eventually decided this type of critique and feedback were also not very useful. We find that we learn more from one another using peer coaching. The instruction librarians are paired (or occasionally made into a trio if numbers are odd) and meet each semester to discuss a particular class in which they would like to implement a new strategy. After the pair discusses their goals and teaches the class, the pair meets again to reflect on how well they feel they met the goal. Our team has also used this structure when we do peer review for other learning objects, such as research guides. The pairs are rotated once a year to provide variety, and the librarians have given positive feedback for this model. We find it useful and enjoyable to work with a partner in a structured way, and it is helpful for people to focus on meeting their goals for the program in a low-stakes manner.

## Administrative Highlights

Along with the learning outcomes, we have a departmental mission and goals that we revisit annually. We have started a reflective teaching portfolio program that houses teaching materials, student artifacts (for assessment and reflection), and instructor reflections for improvement. Ideally, the curriculum map, which lists the programmatic learning outcomes, will eventually link to all of the teaching portfolios for each class where those outcomes are taught and help us assess which concepts are being taught across the curriculum. The map also links to some general teaching activities that can be used for a class that is focusing on a particular frame.

Librarians schedule their own classes with a shared Google calendar that is assigned to the instruction room. Course instructors may email specific librarians to schedule an instruction session, but we encourage them to use the web-based form that was set up for that purpose. Once classes come in through the form, subject liaisons or designated library

workers claim the classes and schedule them. In addition, we use LibCal for creating “office hours” during which students can schedule research appointments.

Our subject librarians teach classes in their assigned liaison departments. The exception to this rule are the classes from the first-year experience program, which aren’t tied to a particular department. For these classes, we are fortunate to have a specialized staff position, and that person takes on the majority of these sessions. If there are classes they are unable to take, the instruction librarians divide up the responsibilities based on interest, availability, and how closely tied the class is to their liaison areas.

## Information Literacy Coordinator Profile

As the current Instruction Coordinator, I (Joanna) was asked if I wanted to take on the associated responsibilities in addition to my regular job as a Reference and Instruction Librarian. Before this occurred, there was a long period of time when there wasn’t any formal coordination outside of what the Head of Reference and Instruction did administratively. The department did not engage in a great deal of formal programmatic planning or pedagogical development. The role is official in both title and practice. However, there was no additional compensation or supervisory responsibilities with this role, only additional work responsibilities.

In my official position description, the coordination role is 40 percent of my job and is described as providing “leadership and vision for library instruction initiatives by planning, implementing, and assessing the library instruction program and services.” The reference and instruction component is listed as 45 percent, and I still serve as a subject liaison for six academic departments. I also pick up classes that don’t fall under a particular subject area. Before the department hired a specialized staff member for our first-year experience courses, I was teaching the bulk of those sessions as well.

## What We Wish People Knew

Coordination is all about negotiating relationships with other people, often without any official supervisory authority or power. Relationship building is a necessary component of the work, not only with other teaching librarians, but also with library administration, academic faculty and staff, and campus administration. The coordinator position should be a leadership role with supervisory input since it is difficult to manage a program without also managing people. The hidden labor is often in the outreach, networking, and administrative housework that you constantly do to keep your program at the front of everyone’s mind. Coordinators tend to exist as the face of their programs and are put in the position of advocating for structural integration of information literacy on campus.

Coordinators often get loaded up with additional teaching responsibilities because they are the people who are most comfortable or knowledgeable about teaching. This position also involves a lot of administrative work or housekeeping, as well as mentoring and helping your colleagues develop as teachers. This labor is difficult to quantify, and it takes a tremendous amount of time and emotional intelligence.

# Notes

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