CAUT Librarians' Committee Discussion Paper on the Expanding Role of Teaching by Librarians in Post-Secondary Institutions

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This paper is to promote discussion within CAUT and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Canadian Association of University Teachers

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Background

In the 1990s, at least three determining factors contributed to rethinking and expanding library instruction programmes in universities: (1) important curriculum changes across North America (2) aggressive student recruitment strategies in post-secondary institutions and (3) widespread use of technology across every sector of society (Julien, 2005).

Significant curriculum changes in the United States and Canada prompted the major US library associations ALA/ACRL and ARL to develop standards for information literacy (IL) competency. Canadian academic libraries were slower to adopt these standards than their American counterparts, but, nonetheless, many librarians working in public services during those years saw *library instruction programmes* emerge as *information literacy programmes*. This meant that librarians would focus less on "library use skills" and more on "information literacy skills"[1]. "Library use skills" generally refer to the ability of identifying and using resources available at and through the library. "Information literacy skills" are more broadly defined and involve critical thinking proficiencies in a number of areas such as refinement of research topic, development of search strategies and even appropriate presentation of retrieved information (Sonntag, 2007).

By the late nineties, information literacy became such a "high profile" competency for university students to acquire, libraries and their staff advocated for integration of information literacy into the curriculum on their campuses (Oberman, C., 1998). This lead to the development of "core competencies programmes" and "curriculum integrated library instruction" which, in turn, frequently moved library instruction outside the library and in the classroom. Academic librarians thus became involved in team teaching with faculty, collaborative instruction with staff in composition/writing programmes and in the design and delivery of credit-bearing courses.

During this same period (also, it should be noted, a period of retrenchment for Canadian universities), student populations diversified as a result of vigorous student recruitment and retention strategies in post-secondary institutions. Canadian universities were involved in a variety of planning exercises which lead them to focus on particular groups such as high school students, first year students, graduate students, mature students, international students, students with disabilities and off-campus students. These recruitment practices, along with rapidly evolving technology, brought about many new methods of instruction tailored to the needs of this diverse student populations. Academic librarians thus became involved in videoconferencing, mediated instruction that blended lecture, demos, hands-on lab sessions, course-based workbooks, credit-based courses, self-paced instruction assignments, videos and online tutorials.

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[1]   Information literacy is a set of abilities requiring individuals to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information." (ACRL, 2005)

What are current practices?

Naturally, instruction programmes and activities in universities across the country will vary according to a number of factors such as size of institution, resources available, institution-wide commitment to information literacy more specifically and library instruction in general, etc. The following list of instruction activities currently happening in Canadian academic libraries is obviously not exhaustive. It is simply meant to provide a sense of the variety and the range of activities in which academic librarians may be involved:

1. Stand-alone or one-shot instruction sessions (faculty initiated) in classrooms: content may be specialized or general; no assignments or grading involved.
2. Workshops series: multiple sessions delivered to the same class. These workshops are generally integrated to courses and often have assignments which librarians are responsible for grading.
3. Library-based IL credit course: librarians teaching credit courses. Involves curriculum design, delivery of entire course, assignments, grading and office hours.
4. Co-teaching with other faculty: librarians participate in the teaching of an entire credit courses with other faculty; usually involves assignments and grading.
5. Tutorials and online instruction modules (basic information literacy packages): librarians develop and maintain applications using teaching software such as WebCT, Blackboard or Moodle. Includes instructional material such as electronic path finders on web sites. Online assignments may be developed and graded through the software or manually.
6. Thematic workshops (library initiated) in the library: drop-in or sign-up workshops, brown-bag lunch series, e.g., orientation, RefWorks, instruction on specific databases; no assignments or grading involved.
7. Universities with library schools: librarians may teach courses in the library school on a part-time or contract basis. Arrangements will vary but most librarians will be doing this teaching as overload and not as part of their regular workload.
8. University recruitment programmes: librarians will often participate by welcoming high school classes or foreign-language students for part of a day, giving them instruction on how to use the library and helping them with research assignments.
9. Research appointments: instruction sessions which may be initiated by an individual or a small group of students. No assignments or grading involved.
10. One on one instruction with users at reference desk or in office.

To describe even further the expansion of the teaching role of librarians in the last decade, it is important to emphasize that most of the above activities involve at least one or more of the following activities:[2]

1. Planning (at the programme level, including identification of learning outcomes)
2. Promoting (marketing library instruction services to students, faculty, administration)

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[2]   These are drawn from the 1997-2006 programs of WILU (*Workshop on Instruction in Library Use),* a yearly conference held in Canada and dedicated to library instruction in colleges and universities. In 2007, this 2-day event which "emphasize[s] experiences and learning" is in its 36th year.

3. Delivering (activities including course and assignment design and preparation, assignment correction and contact with students outside formal setting, team teaching with faculty, software support)
4. Assessing (entire instruction programme, individual courses, teaching style, user needs in instruction)

Workload

The expanding role of teaching by librarians, including the hiring of a new "breed" of instruction librarian in the last number of years, has had a transformative impact on the workload of academic librarians across the country. The language used to describe librarians' instruction responsibilities is often very charged with emotion or frustration as librarians indicate that instruction is taking more and more of their time, with little relief in other areas. Gerrard and Knoch (2004) state that instruction is a duty "in addition to our regular responsibilities," and that "it was not uncommon for us to work many extra hours." Newhouse (2006), a new academic librarian, reports that she is often exhausted - "I see that teaching really wears me out," and "I wake up in a panic at 11:44 pm, thinking about my online class." Given the impact teaching has on our workloads, it is interesting that very little had been published that addresses what is becoming, for many academic librarians, their raison d'etre.   A review of the literature found only a few articles that deals in a peripheral way with this looming workload issue. As well, it is interesting to note that a CAUT Discussion Paper (1999) on the topic of Librarian Workloads makes no mention of "instruction", although it does address many other librarian functions, such as collection development and cataloguing.

One study being conducted in Canada by Heidi Julien (2005) is a longitudinal project[3] which "aims to document information literacy (IL) instructional practices in Canadian academic libraries (college and university libraries)". Although she notes interesting trends and some issues arising from these, she does not offer any discussion of the impact of these emerging instruction practices on librarians' workloads. The following are some of the trends that Julien reports:
- formal instructional classes increasing
- informal instruction (one-on-one) is predominant
- only a few libraries have written statements of objectives for their instructional programme
- client groups: 1) first year students remain a priority; 2) teaching staff (faculty) on the rise
- the proportion of full-time instructional librarians has increased significantly
- the largest proportion of respondents report that staff spend between 26% and 50% of their time on instructional activities at the start of the year and for the remainder of the year they spend less than 25% on instructional activities
- evaluation of instruction: emphasis remained on "informal" types of evaluation
- instructional objectives: even though Information Literacy (IL) still widely includes "how to", librarians report a shift in their IL objectives to involve teaching critical thinking and evaluation of resources.

There are numerous issues arising out of the growing demand for instruction in academic libraries and the teaching of information literacy at post-secondary institutions. While workload may be the

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3   Her survey is conducted every five years and until now, it has been conducted in 1995, 2000 and 2005.

paramount concern, there are other more nuanced issues which also require attention. For instance, in institutions where librarians have instruction as their only assigned library-duty, are they considered "teaching faculty" and treated as such? In other words, are librarians being compensated for their teaching in a manner similar to their teaching faculty colleagues? Likely not. Are librarians who teach "one-shot workshops" in the library and others who teach for-credit courses in regular classrooms treated equitably? Are their duties and responsibilities considered the same? Should they be, or should collective agreements specify that not all teaching is equal.

Among some issues that Julien reports, two are worth mentioning in the context of this discussion paper: (1) challenging relationships between teaching faculty and instructional librarians; (2) concerns about instructional librarians' pedagogic expertise. Despite the fact that these issues are, among others, often at the heart of the status of academic librarians within their institutions, the following questions need to be asked:

- Should librarians teach credit-bearing courses as part of their workloads? If they do, will they become overworked, undervalued and underpaid professionals within their organizations, or does teaching, in fact, elevate the librarians' role and legitimize them as faculty?

- Should 'instruction' (workshops, one-shot classroom sessions) and 'teaching' (shared or stand-alone credit courses) be considered distinct workloads and differentiated from one another in collective agreements?

- How and when is instruction described in librarians' workload statements, for both those librarians where instruction as a major component and for those where instruction is one of many duties?

- For those librarians whose workload includes the word 'instruction' as a description of all instruction-related duties, should it be described in detail? Could lack of detail be a result of the uncertainty of the number and type of instruction sessions that will be offered in a given year, and thus, uncertainty regarding the amount of prep time required? If this work is better quantified, would it assist with building in time to cope with rapidly changing technologies?

- Finally, how can new librarians (or those librarians new to instruction) be properly trained to gain appropriate experience so that they can prepare for and deliver instruction sessions within the boundaries of their workloads and the priorities set by library administration, without ignoring their other academic duties and responsibilities?

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