
Faculty-librarian cooperation: a personal retrospective

Evan Farber

The author

Evan Farber is College Librarian Emeritus, Earlham College, Richmond, Indiana, USA.

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Abstract

Farber surveys the past 25-30 years in library instruction, and in particular the cooperation and collaboration between librarians and teaching faculty. Resistance has only been studied recently. Course integrated program at Earlham made cooperation and collaboration imperative. Over the years there has been increasing interest in this approach.

[Evan Farber spoke twice at LOEX conferences, and both times on the same subject, working with faculty. In *Faculty Involvement in Library Instruction* (fifth annual conference), he was the wrap-up speaker, summarizing the conference (Farber, 1976).

In *Working with Faculty in the New Electronic Library* (nineteenth annual conference) he was the keynote speaker, and by this time the acknowledged expert in the area of faculty/librarian cooperation (Farber, 1992). Evan Farber has stayed with this subject so long because he rightly recognizes it as one of the most essential ingredients in effective library instruction – cooperation between the teaching faculty and the teaching librarian. Success in this area has been hard-won, as his article makes clear, and in many ways the battle is not yet won. Nevertheless, it is an issue at the heart of successful library instruction and information literacy. The following article is a reflection on Evan Farber's many years of experience in this teaching-learning process – L. Shirato.]

Introduction

Over the last several decades, many librarians who have taken part in course-related bibliographic instruction have written and spoken about a problem that every one of them has encountered – the problem of cooperation with teaching faculty. The large number of articles in periodicals, plus chapters in books, and presentations to conferences that dealt with the problem all attest to the problem's prevalence, persistence and importance. Whatever their format, these statements have almost always been based on first-hand experience, experience gained as the authors or speakers had tried to implement or to improve a program of bibliographic instruction.

History of the problem

Given the fact that for at least a century a number of college librarians had either provided or attempted to provide instruction in use of their libraries, one might have expected that the problem would have been discussed some time

ago. But that does not seem to have been the case. For example, Harvie Branscomb and Louis Shores, both of whom wrote what are now generally considered classics in the history of bibliographic instruction, did not even consider the problem. Of course, neither had first-hand experience with trying to implement a program and both of them wrote long before the bibliographic instruction movement really got underway.

Harvie Branscomb's *Teaching with Books: A Study of College Libraries* (Branscomb, 1940) provided a convincing rationale for college librarians who were interested in making their libraries more effective participants in undergraduate education. His premise, based on a survey of some 60 colleges that in particular examined students' use of their libraries, was that the libraries were sadly underused. He suggested a number of ways to correct the situation, most of them involving a more active role for college librarians. He also clearly saw the need for students to become more proficient in using the library, but he felt the teaching faculty was the appropriate vehicle, with the librarians playing a helpful but subordinate role. "The point which should be guarded against is the library taking over all responsibility for library instruction" (Branscomb, 1940, p. 208). One can hardly fault Branscomb for that attitude (and it would surely be ungrateful to do so). Although at the time of the survey he was a university library director, he was primarily a scholar and teacher, and immersed in that "faculty culture" that Larry Hardesty so trenchantly described and analyzed in his article, "Faculty culture and bibliographic instruction: an exploratory analysis" (Hardesty, 1995). Because Branscomb's views were, in a sense, restricted by his own academic role and status, he could not foresee the resistance by teaching faculty to innovations such as bibliographic instruction.

Library college movement

If one considers the range of cooperative working relationships between teaching faculty and librarians as a spectrum, surely at one end of that spectrum is Louis Shores' Library College Movement, which envisioned all courses

being taught in the library by "library-trained, subject-matter experts." Shores' views, published from the 1930s into the 1950s, attracted a number of librarians initially; as a matter of fact, I was one of those idealists intrigued by his views, but along with many others I soon recognized the limitation of that idealism, the practical impossibility of sustaining those views in a real academic setting. It may be an oversimplification of their ideas, but not, I trust, a distortion of them, to say that Branscomb thought of librarians almost as handmaidens of the teaching faculty while Shores saw the two roles melded into one. There must be – I know there are – many other possible relationships, but it seemed to me many years ago and still seems to me that the most sensible, most practical relationship is a cooperative one, in which teaching faculty work with librarians.

Educating the library user

Less than a decade after the interest in the Library-College Movement had subsided, John Lubans' landmark book, *Educating the Library User*, was published (Lubans, 1974). It was a substantial work, containing 38 contributions by librarians from academic school and public libraries discussing and describing their approaches to and programs of user education. My contribution to that collection was a description and rationale for our program of course-related bibliographic instruction at Earlham (Farber, 1974). At one point, while discussing the role of librarians as instructors, I offered some of my reasons why our program did not accept the conclusions of either Branscomb or Shores:

teaching faculty are discouraged from giving library instruction or even from preparing explanatory materials for assignments that entail bibliographic tools, without consulting with librarians [W]hile the teaching faculty have the central responsibility for the educational enterprise, librarians can help them carry out that responsibility much more effectively and at the same time enhance it. While the two groups – teaching faculty and librarians – can and should work together, neither can do the other's job (Farber, 1974, p. 157).

All instruction librarians will recognize that there's a major gap between the "should work together" and the reality of most institutional

situations. That gap, of course, is the crux of the problem. Certainly I recognized the problem, but felt this way:

one must come to the conclusion (regretfully, perhaps) that only by working through the courses, and that means through individual faculty members, can the objectives of library instruction presently be achieved. Working with faculty, then, becomes a given (Farber, 1974, p. 160).

Monteith Library experiment

That was hardly an original position. In 1966 Patricia Knapp's *The Monteith College Library Experiment* had been published (Knapp, 1966). It certainly was – and perhaps still is – one of the most important and influential works in the development of library instruction. The book described a research project that was concerned with “exploring methods of developing a more vital relationship between the library and college teaching” (Knapp, 1966, p. 11). The project, implemented in 1960-1962, was based on the conviction that the key to library instruction was in the structure of the relationship between librarians and faculty. In an earlier article, Knapp had clearly spelled out the importance of involving the teaching faculty:

instruction in the use of the library will be really effective only if it is presented by the regular teaching faculty as an integral part of content courses in all subject fields. The cooperative efforts of most of the faculty must be enlisted in working through the processes involved, and the whole faculty must be committed to the fundamental value of the project (Knapp, 1956, p. 226).

And a few pages later she commented that “the librarian must convince the faculty that library instruction is necessary; he must educate the faculty on the potential role of the library and assist it in planning instruction” (Knapp, 1956, pp. 230-31). She then went on to suggest steps that should help implement that effort.

As intelligent and logical as Knapp's approach was, and although she occasionally seemed to recognize that most teaching faculty were fairly traditional and conservative in their teaching, I always wondered why she did not recognize two factors: one, how readily the attitudes behind their practices can

translate into resistance, resistance not only to a librarian's overtures but to almost any educational innovation (Kazlow, 1973; Evans, 1968); and two, that such resistance was easily overcome in the Monteith experiment because it was an experiment and had the full support of the college's administration. It is perhaps unfair to fault her because it is only with a good bit of experience and a number of frustrating encounters in that experience that one can see how prevalent that resistance is. But I digress.

Educational worth of course-related instruction

If at one time I advocated course-related instruction “regretfully,” as I noted earlier, after several years more experience with our program, and with many opportunities to hear about and observe other approaches, I realized that even from an educational perspective course-related instruction was the most effective one. And so I became even more convinced that cooperation between librarians and classroom teachers was a necessity. That conviction meant that the other Earlham librarians and I worked continually and energetically with a wide variety of teaching faculty – a wide variety of personalities, of disciplines, of teaching styles.

At the same time we saw that many other academic librarians agreed on the advantages of course-related instruction and, because the cooperative relationship that undergirded that approach worked so well at Earlham, we began offering workshops on our program, initially on our campus, and subsequently around the country. The most effective ingredient of those workshops was the series of presentations by the teaching faculty who described how and why they worked with librarians in particular courses, in many cases in both planning assignments and providing the instruction (Hardesty *et al.*, 1993).

Earlham's impact

My increasing optimism about the possibilities of cooperation with the teaching faculty was due, I am sure, to a number of factors. First was

the continuing growth and improvement of our own program where we saw even closer and more creative working relationships develop between instruction librarians and faculty. Second was the increasing interest shown by others in our program in a wide variety of institutions, some of which I had written off long ago as unsuited because of the size or other institutional characteristics, or simply as shortsighted, or even more often, as smug. Third was the striking growth of the bibliographic instruction movement, a growth accompanied by an intellectual ferment and proliferation of activities that had to make anyone who participated in the movement excited about its present and confident about its future.

That optimism was tempered by the realization that, as I wrote in 1985, “if the library is to take an active role in the teaching-learning process faculty cooperation and support are essential. That cooperation and support have not been forthcoming very often” (Farber, 1985, p. 668). And certainly not as often as I would have liked. One reason was that, in the words of one college president, “Academic faculty are, for the most part, not predisposed as scholars to recognize and to acknowledge a legitimate educational role for the library and for librarians” (Farber, 1985, pp. 68-9).

On the other hand, my optimism resurfaced in that same paper’s last section, “Conclusion: problems and prospects”:

Faculty attitudes are changing and will change even more. Certainly a factor will be the improving quality of librarians. Also, the impetus of the bibliographic instruction movement will make it a part of most college teachers’ stock in trade, and they will be working more closely with librarians in constructive ways. The new library technology should change attitudes in several ways. A study of faculty perceptions showed that, for newer faculty, their most negative feelings about the library resulted from “their perception of adequacy of the collection in their areas.” When technology permits access to so much material, the cause for that negative attitude should disappear

In addition, faculty will increasingly recognize the importance of instruction by librarians to help them find and evaluate all the material available to them and their students (Farber, 1985, p. 71).

Electronic resources’ impact

I was rather prescient in that prediction, I think, and ten years later, when the potential of the new information technology had become obvious, I was able to write that:

In the past, one obstacle bibliographic instruction librarians faced was that so many faculty taught just as they were taught. Now, however, faculty recognize that their teaching toolkit must include the Internet, or Dialog, or whatever electronic resources are appropriate for their courses. Because librarians are the ones to show their students how to gain access to those sources and to demonstrate what they provide, faculty members are much more willing to accept librarians as teaching colleagues – not fully accepted in all cases, but at least as colleagues to teach and work with (Farber, 1995, p. 432).

No amount of prescience, however, could have anticipated the Internet, and certainly not the amount and variety of data available on it, ranging from absolutely useless, even at times dangerous information, to newsworthy, helpful, and important material. On the one hand the Internet’s availability, ease of access, and immediate response make its use very tempting for students, most of whom are primarily interested in convenience and in saving time; on the other hand, its anarchy and absence of structure make its use a problem for even the sophisticated user. Teachers used to have some control over the sources their students used – reading lists, reserves, the library’s collection – but the allure of instant information on the Internet has changed all that. The major problem with this changed situation is, of course, that most students are unable to discriminate.

Yet that is nothing new; in the pre-electronic era, students typically thought that if they found any books or articles on their topics in the library, they were worth using. It was difficult enough to teach them that not everything in print was valid, and that there are criteria, intellectual filters one can use to separate the wheat from the chaff, the scholarly from the spurious. With the Internet, however, because it is so volatile in so many dimensions, teaching students how to use it intelligently is a formidable task – and some would say, impossible, just now. But there is no question that in time (and I think in just a few years) it will become less

volatile, more structured, and as it does there will be ways of determining criteria for the evaluation of sources. The teaching faculty is increasingly aware of the educational challenge the Internet poses, and also aware that they do not have the time or expertise to keep up with the continual changes and improvements. They know that while they can provide some guidance in helping students find and evaluate information, they'll have to depend on librarians to really do the job. This attitude was nicely expressed by James Wilkinson, director of Harvard's Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning:

[T]he ordering of information on the Internet or in keyword search does not allow the user to discriminate between what is more or less important. The information superhighway, in other words, provides too much information and too little organization. Who will perform the complex triage that separates what the researcher needs to know from the mass of second- or third-order information? Some traffic-watchers on the information superhighway have argued that programmable "agents" (that is, electronic instructions) can do this work for us. But I think that a far better human agent is at hand – reference librarians (Wilkinson, 1997, pp. 186-7).

Ideal cooperative relationship

When that cooperative relationship works well, it can result in assignments that approach, if not reach, what I consider the ideal: where both the teacher's objectives and the librarian's objectives are not only achieved, but are mutually reinforcing – the teacher's objectives being those that help students attain a better understanding of the course's subject matter, and the librarian's objectives being those that enhance the students' ability to find and evaluate information.

Where will instruction librarians find the time? The one-shot, one-class period of library instruction has always been hard enough to get, yet once gotten rarely seemed enough to provide as much instruction as one felt appropriate. But now, with teaching the variety of databases within the library or available online, added to all the basic instruction, 50 minutes is hardly adequate. The required time, I think, will become available because basic instruction, which now takes up so much of a librarian's

time, will be taken care of by expert systems built into many databases. These systems will guide users, help them select the appropriate databases, instruct them in using the database, then help in selecting items from the databases. A precursor of these systems is Ohio State University's The Gateway to Information (Tiefel, 1995). But as effective as it is, it is still relatively primitive, only a beginning to a very sophisticated technological development.

The future

That time is some years away. Until then, instruction librarians will continue working with faculty, constantly improving instructional approaches and procedures. Expert systems, after all, are only as good as the expert opinions and practices on which the systems are based. But even when expert systems become a standard, perhaps even a major component of library instruction, there will still be a role for instruction that is tailored to a unique or experimental assignment. As long as the separate course is the keystone of higher education, and as long as students need new information for fulfilling assignments in those separate courses, cooperation between faculty and instruction librarians will still be an important factor.

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