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Collaborating on Flipped Library Sessions: 8 Best Practices for Faculty & Librarians

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A common practice at many colleges and universities involves course faculty inviting librarians into their classrooms to teach research and information literacy skills and concepts customized to disciplinary or course needs. Library instruction varies in format but often manifests in the librarian teaching a single, isolated class session—what librarians refer to as a “one-shot.” Many challenges accompany this traditional format, including time-constraints, disengaged audiences, and little understanding on the part of the student as to how the library instruction integrates with course content.

Flipped Learning methods can help counter these challenges even when the overall course is not based on a flipped model. They liberate librarians and faculty from the one-shot model and expand opportunities for library instruction to occur at multiple times in a course, to be delivered virtually or in person, and to invoke a broader range of educational tools. Increasingly, librarians and faculty are collaboratively designing more engaging and relevant library experiences for their students by incorporating Flipped Learning. Among other benefits, the model is exalted for its emphases on cooperative learning, active learning, critical thinking, problem solving, and self-assessment (Roehl, Reddy, and Shannon 2013). Below we offer eight best practices for those who are interested in exploring flipped methods for incorporating library content into a course.

1. Plan Early (and Long-Term)

As with any effective pedagogical model, flipping content takes time, careful thought, and energy. To do so for library instruction requires additional communication and coordination between the librarian and faculty. Planning at least one semester ahead of implementation ensures time to create engaging, relevant lesson plans and tools (such as tutorials, videos, or activities) that have a greater chance of success. This effort is optimized for courses that are offered regularly.

2. Collaborate Rather than Allocate

Working together to connect individual expertise is critical, particularly because students tune out when library instruction is framed as a supplemental guest lecture. Librarians contribute expertise of information literacy and research skills, while faculty bring knowledge of the discipline and student dispositions. A strong partnership unlocks opportunities, anticipates challenges, and integrates material into the course in ways that neither individual could accomplish independently.

3. Tie and Time Directly with Assignments

Instructors commonly schedule library instruction early in the semester so that students can employ the content throughout the course. While appropriate in some cases, this timing often leads to a

disconnection between information literacy skills and their application to a major research project due at the end of the course. Choosing a time when students have already begun working on the assignment and being transparent with them about how these skills will be integral to a particular assignment will bond the significance of the instruction to the student's success, increasing student motivation and engagement.

4. Construct Impactful Student Learning Outcomes

Flipped Learning enables library instruction to expand beyond lower-order skills (such as resource navigation or source citation) and into more advanced concepts that directly tie to the behavior of information within a discipline. Librarians can introduce or review basic skills with online content prior to an in-class session, which leaves more class time to delve into course-integrated concepts like the political, social, economic, and professional contexts that shape the creation, availability, and use of information sources.

5. Build in Incentive

Bergmann and Sams (2012), designers of Flipped Learning, found face-to-face sessions likely to fail if the majority of students do not complete the out-of-class work that is typically required of the model. Incentives can motivate students to complete the work, but coordination is essential as it is the faculty member, not the librarian, who manages communication and holds authority with students. Incentives include graded online assignments, in-class review games, peer-review or self-evaluation activities, inclusion of out-of-class content in exam questions, or even social consequences of being unprepared to contribute to group work. Such activities may require additional grading, group facilitation, or content creation that the instructor and librarian can allocate in the planning process.

6. Implement Technology Thoughtfully

Technology is typically what enables the flexibility of flipped models, and the librarian may have access to or familiarity with different technologies than the instructor. The faculty member and librarian should work together to determine the suitability, availability, accessibility, and help resources of potential technologies in regards to the creation process and use by students. A consistent tenet of Flipped Learning is to use only technology that enhances pedagogy, rather than using technology for its own sake.

7. Provide Follow-Up

Connecting students with a librarian and offering point-of-need assistance is often a goal of inviting a librarian into the classroom; however, students may encounter obstacles later on while completing assignments. By duly referring back to library content and providing contact information in multiple places and formats, faculty can encourage students to identify and make use of library resources when they are needed. Technology further offers means of connecting students with research help. For example, the librarian can send follow-up emails directly to students after a session or the instructor can incorporate the librarian into the course learning management system.

8. Update and Revise

Collaborative relationships build over time and are, as with teaching in general, iterative. Over time, mistakes, revelations, and student interactions will spark new ideas to increase the effectiveness of the content. After each implementation, the faculty member and librarian should reflect together on the course and discuss any changes for the future. Likewise, it may be appropriate to gather feedback from students directly or otherwise integrate the assessment of information literacy into the course in order to inform changes that will improve that student experience.

We encourage you to investigate Flipped Learning collaborations with your librarian as a way of advancing your students' disciplinary information literacy skills. While requiring redistributed time and planning, library sessions based on flipped models have been shown to enhance both the learning experience for students and the teaching experience overall (Hawes and Mason Adamson 2016; Loo et al. 2016).

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