LOEX 2007 "How to Embed a Librarian" Conference Paper
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Background

Human and Organizational Development (HOD) is the largest undergraduate major at Vanderbilt University. The curriculum depends on a strong foundation in information literacy competencies. HOD 1000 is a critical course for the students to develop those competencies. The major writing assignment in the course is a research paper which requires the students to utilize scholarly, peer-reviewed literature. Students enrolled in HOD 1000 tend to be first semester freshmen. A research paper is a familiar assignment from their high school days; however, trying to locate, evaluate, and utilize scholarly information presents quite the challenge for them.
In the past, many students in this course have needed extensive assistance from Peabody Library staff to find appropriate information for their research papers and to format their bibliographies into the American Psychological Association (APA) citation format.

In the summer of 2006, the Peabody librarians proposed the concept of the "embedded librarian" to the HOD 1000 course instructor as an innovative approach in trying to connect students to the Library and its resources. It was agreed that a librarian would audit the course for the fall semester with the intent of being a visible extension of the Library. The librarian would keep a diary of reflections of the experiment, and write a summary report at the end of the semester.

Class Reflections

Before the class officially began, the course instructor and librarian agreed that it would be best if the librarian attended the formal class lecture each Tuesday morning for an hour and fifteen minutes. HOD 1000 students attend a class lecture on Tuesdays and then followed by a lab and lecture on Thursdays. The "embedded librarian" embarked on new her role on August 24, 2006 at the very early hour of 8:10am in the morning. During that first meeting, the course instructor introduced the librarian to the class. She spoke briefly stressing that she was there to assist with their projects and was their contact person in the Library.

From the end of August to the beginning of September, the librarian networked in the class. Each week, she sat in the same section of the classroom so the students could see that she was there, and after a few weeks some of the students began gravitating to that section so they could sit near her. The librarian was able to learn these students' names and had informal conversations with them. Some students' were unsure on what to call their embedded librarian and she assured them that using her first name was fine.

As the semester progressed and the research paper began to become a reality, the librarian and students began to have frequent interactions with each other. The students would contact via email or stop after class to ask their library contact person a question on how to get started with their papers. It was apparent that the students were apprehensive at first to ask for help, but once the initial contact was made, any uneasiness quickly faded. Also, the librarian had announced in the first class that office hours were not required to see

her, so the students should feel free to stop in when it was convenient for them. That seemed to really impress the students!

In October, the students focused on their research paper. The librarian organized eight library instruction sessions. The students were not required to attend. The first sessions exposed the students to the appropriate research databases for their paper as well as the Library's online catalog. For many of these students attending these sessions, this was the first time they had visited Peabody Library. The last instruction sessions focused on learning the American Psychological Association (APA) citation style. Most freshmen tend to be exposed to the Modern Language Association (MLA) format in high school so learning APA style tended to be quite the challenge.

Out of the 106 students enrolled in the class, 67 attended either a library research database or APA citation session over a two week period in October. Library staff members had 40 individual research consultations for students. One student in particular met with her embedded librarian each morning in her office for a week. They ate breakfast together and discussed the intricacies of writing a research paper and using APA format.

The research paper was due in early November, and the students worked frantically till the end. The embedded librarian had numerous students visit her office in the days leading up to the due date. It was very gratifying to see these students in the Library using the resources that had been shown to them. The librarian was also very flattered when students brought their completed research papers in for her to view, especially the list of references, before turning it into their instructor. The drop-in visits showed that the students had overcome barriers in asking for library-related assistance and had become comfortable in seeking their librarian out. From the end of November to the last class lecture in early December, the students prepared for the final exam.

Impact

Embedding a librarian in a key course that requires mastering information literacy competencies is very worthwhile. The personal contact that the librarian had with these students built relationships and habits that will continue to grow throughout their undergraduate careers. These students see the library now as a place to go for help with their academic work. They also see the library staff as approachable and as partners in the academic experience.

The librarian also knew when she started this adventure that she would need to make herself visible each week in class; otherwise she would have just become another face in the crowd. She knew she would need to approach the students to make their acquaintance and develop relationships with them. Being proactive and upbeat is paramount in this type of situation.

There are a few drawbacks however, since embedding a librarian into any course can also provide problems due to the added responsibilities for the librarian and library staff. Therefore, it is essential for the librarian to be able to set aside blocks of time so that proper attention can be given to the course requirements. It might be useful to reduce the number of hours one would serve

at a library service desk or reassign other duties prior to starting an embedded endeavor. The designated librarian should also be realistic in what he or she hopes to achieve in a semester, because once the students realize that this resource exists they will seek help immediately, and any free time that the librarian once had for other duties will be lost.