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CHAPTER 11*

Dynamic Duos: Blended Instruction and Faculty-Librarian Collaboration†

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Introduction

In the winter of 2014, an English Department faculty member (Dawn) and a librarian faculty member (Kathleen) at Vancouver Island University (VIU), a Canadian undergraduate university with a full-time enrollment of 6,500 students, collaborated to design and deliver a semester-long, senior-level English Research Methods course. While the course covered literary research methods and methodologies, it was underpinned by apprenticeship in scholarly communication introducing models of collaboration, production, peer-review, altmetrics, online scholarly personas, open access, and knowledge mobilization. Through instruction, course logistics, and assignments, we challenged students, and ourselves, to explore the question: what does it mean to be a scholar today? Using reflection, student feedback, and continued dialogue, this chapter reflects on our partnership as it explores how other librarians and disciplinary faculty can work together to introduce, encourage, and mentor

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students in an increasingly complicated scholarly communication landscape. Throughout this paper, we draw on the Council of Writing Program Administrators, National Council of Teachers of English, and National Writing Project (WPA, NCTE, and NWP)'s *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing* (hereafter referred to as WPA Framework), where it applies to a course at the senior undergraduate level. ¹ After describing our collaboration, we also consider it in light of the new Association of College and Research Librarians (ACRL) *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.*² By examining both the WPA and ACRL Framework, we conclude that librarian-disciplinary faculty partnerships in research methods courses are an ideal setting to explore with students the complex and shifting technical and collaborative information dispositions to which the ACRL Framework refers, particularly using the vehicle of scholarly communication and how scholars share their thoughts with each other and a wider audience.

**Librarians in the Classroom**

As librarians seek to enhance the information literacy skills of students, embedded librarianship is increasingly discussed as a potential avenue.³ The practice entails “[taking] a librarian out of the context of the traditional library and…. [placing] him or her in an ‘on-site’ setting or situation that enables close coordination and collaboration with researchers or teaching faculty.”⁴

While there is a significant amount of discussion on embedded librarianship, few articles focus specifically on embedding librarians in research methods classes at either the undergraduate or graduate level. Those articles that do explore this context are from a range of disciplines such as political science,⁵ liberal studies,⁶ and education.⁷ As with much of the scholarship related to embedded librarianship, the basis of librarian participation, in all of the previously mentioned studies, is traditional information literacy instruction: developing research questions and finding, evaluating, and documenting sources. These skills are grounded in both the WPA Framework’s critical thinking objectives and ACRL’s *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (2000), the latter of which was often seen as a highly prescriptive set of standards.⁸

However, with the ACRL updating the Standards in favor of the Framework, there exists a space for librarians to consider their engagement with information literacy instruction in new ways. Of particular relevance to this chapter is an emphasis on understanding scholarly conversations taking place in all stages of research, which has not been a focus of the previous literature written by librarians embedded in research methods courses. Thus, scholarly conversations in the process of knowledge creation are part of scholarly communication,
which also includes ways of sharing the research product. In this light, scholarly communication and information literacy are intimately related, and a research methods course is an ideal place for students to encounter that relationship. While librarian interest in the intersection of these two areas is growing, this has not been discussed in the context of research methods courses.

Our Project

Research Methods is a senior-level undergraduate English course taught on a two-year cycle at Vancouver Island University (VIU). Despite her specialization in literary theory, Dawn had avoided teaching the Research Methods course in the past. She was hesitant for two reasons: the first was how methodologies (the connection to theory) had traditionally been approached both at VIU and similar institutions, which she felt inhibited critical thinking with regard to literary theory; the second was the fact she did not consider herself a good role model as a researcher. She comments, “I always feel as if I am playing catch-up with information technology used in research. However, a moment of inspiration on a long walk helped me to get past the first hesitation. Reading just a little about collaboration in the Digital Humanities also made me realize that I should just find an expert to help me with the latter.” Having come to this realization, Dawn sought out a librarian partner.

While Dawn’s initial request to the library for a librarian guest instructor did include information literacy, Kathleen was specifically recruited because of her training and experience with digital humanities, and she brought with her an interest in scholarly communication. The VIU Library does not have a significant history of partnerships between teaching and librarian faculty related to co-teaching and embedded librarianship. Librarians had been looking for opportunities to change this pattern, and Dawn’s proposal was a chance to pilot a new model of working with instructional faculty. Dawn would teach the English Literature content, and Kathleen would cover information literacy, digital humanities, research technology, and scholarly communication. We worked together, though, to develop the syllabus and assignments.

Course Design & Curriculum

The course explored the multifaceted relationships between literature, literary criticism, and literary theory, as it endeavored to prepare students for the level of critical thinking required in graduate studies a concept at the core of the WPA Framework. Together, we studied a canonical text, Mary Shelley’s

* In this, our course further develops the WPA Framework on critical thinking (7).
read several critical articles on *Frankenstein* that approach the novel from different theoretical perspectives, and read some of the theoretical texts informing those critical articles. We then followed the same process with a much less known text, Canadian author Daphne Marlatt’s *Ana Historic* (1988), which has a strong intertextual relationship with *Frankenstein*. We discussed in detail how one literary text may be informed by another; how literature informs criticism, and vice versa; and how literary theory informs both and can be, in turn, informed by both in a literary ecosystem.

In addition to providing students with an introduction to traditional literary research methods and methodologies, we also explored how the field of digital humanities is changing how many literary scholars work. As Katherine Hales writes, “[H]umanities scholars are confronting the differences that digital media make in every aspect of humanistic inquiry, including conceptualizing projects, implementing research programs, designing curricula, and educating students.” We took this a step further, by also looking at the ways in which digital media is changing scholarly communication. Exploring digital humanities projects expanded ideas of what counts as scholarship, and it offered new insights into texts through the use of text mining and visualization. Students were introduced to what the WPA Framework refers to as “composing in multiple environments,” viewing scholarly work packaged as a website, not the standard book or journal article with which they are used to working. For example, we explored an e-book that allows readers to comment on the text and respond to each other. Instead of a solitary student or academic reading the book then publishing a reply months later, the e-book allows for public engagement with the text in real time. We discussed the implications of such projects with regard to both strengths and weaknesses. From viewing scholarly writing in website and interactive e-book form, students learned this mode of delivery offers avenues to convey meaning that standard academic papers do not.

In addition to seeing how technology is changing the study of English literature, we wanted students to experience how it is shaping the methods in which scholars collaborate and communicate. Structurally, we purposely set up the logistics of the course to emulate how scholars increasingly collaborate with each other by offering the course at a regional campus remotely via video-conferencing and requiring students to discuss scholarly material in online forums. These technologies are not novel and are, in fact, used in many courses today. However, it is not as common to metacognitively consider the impact of these technologies on our communication and our work. Moreover, our experience has shown us many teachers rarely specifically identify and stress the importance of developing related skills: being flexible with plans, ideas, and technology and approaching our work with an open, playful, resilient, and critical attitude, more ideas found in the WPA Framework. Through self-reflection, as well
as communicating about and demonstrating these skills, we hoped to model a critical attitude required for twenty-first century scholarly work.

Assignments

The major assignment was designed to replicate the steps of scholarly production for an academic researcher. First, students read the texts and developed research questions. They then carried out their own research while considering the influence of different theoretical points of view on the development of their research questions. The final paper served as a vehicle to discuss several scholarly communication issues, in particular the peer-review process. In setting up the exercise, Kathleen explored the traditional peer-review system with students, considering its strengths and weaknesses, as well as possible alternatives. One of the alternatives introduced in this course was pre-publication peer review, in which a work is posted for peers to review before it is published in final form. We discussed this model in class, then gave the students an assignment stimulating this workflow. Once the students had written their research papers, they posted their essays online, using the course management software, where they read and critiqued each other’s work. Incorporating feedback they received from their peers, students submitted the final version of their papers to the instructors one week later.

While this exercise, in itself, is not much different from an online writing workshop, by framing it in the context of the peer-review process, we hoped the students would gain a professional perspective of it. Thus, it became more than an exercise; it was also an opportunity to learn more about the peer-review process, to think critically about it, and about the new directions in which it is going.

In addition to allowing students to experience how academic work comes into being, the peer-review assignment allowed students to practice skills required to function in today’s scholarly environment. Students gained experience in constructively critiquing a colleague’s work in writing, as well as receiving, evaluating, and incorporating selected feedback. The feedback on the assignment we initially received from students was that they were uncomfortable with their peers seeing their work before it’s done. This is unsurprising, as many English courses are not set up to allow students to see each other’s work, despite the WPA Framework calling on instructors to help “develop flexible writing processes by having students […] work with others in various stages of writing.”

Ironically, although writing and peer-review workshops are almost always part of first-year composition courses, these soft skills are less often used and rarely explicitly taught by professors in upper-level courses, despite the fact they are vital to learning to work in a scholarly environment and other
workplaces. To this end, the course tried to move students beyond the idea of a perfected, fixed piece of scholarship written in isolation, pointing out the ways in which scholars are curating scholarly thoughts that shift and change over time via collaboration, both in person and on social media.

Another exercise, related to the final paper assignment, raised the issue of knowledge mobilization—the way scholars shape and deliver research findings. After watching several short YouTube videos by scholars talking about their research, students worked with a partner to practice a one-minute speech explaining their final research paper to a lay audience. The WPA Framework refers to this as “developing rhetorical knowledge,” calling on educators to give students opportunities to “write for different audiences, purposes, and contexts.” An opportunity to put this into practice came in the form of a serendipitously timed event: a research colloquium on how technology is changing the humanities, where several of the students volunteered to present in front of several hundred people. Topics included research via the deep web, the final essay peer-review assignment, and collaboration via video conferencing. The aim of these exercises was for students to experience adapting their message and its packaging depending on audience and purpose.

**Student and Faculty Feedback**

Course evaluation survey data showed the students were overwhelmingly in favor of the co-teaching approach. Several students in the class recognized this collaboration made the course better than either faculty member could have produced alone, and a few urged us to go even further in integrating instruction.

Unlike our decision to collaborate, the choice to incorporate as much of the technology scholars are using as possible for the sake of introducing students to working in a technical environment was not uniformly successful. Students found video-conferencing to be difficult to deal with because people are represented as small talking heads on camera, so body language was not always clear. More problematic were one-second signal delays which caused interruptions and false starts in discussion. However, one technological element received very well by the students was an online environment to model the peer-review process. Students found it useful to both read the work of other students and receive feedback themselves. One student commented, “The process required me to take other people's feedback and apply it to my paper, resulting in a very thoughtful revision.” From both our disciplinary perspectives, the assignment worked brilliantly to facilitate a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the peer-review process, as well as identify how it might be improved.

We received feedback from colleagues as well. At the research colloquium, even though some students were critical of some of our uses of technology,
colleagues from other disciplines commented that this kind of collaboration in a research methods course should be considered by their departments. Additionally, as the English Department is nearing the end of a full curriculum review, our project has helped influence the department to revise its research methods course description to include information literacy and scholarly communication. A second result is the departmental upper-level planning committee has proposed making this course mandatory for the department’s new Honor’s Program. A third development is the department has proposed embedding a librarian in its new senior-level Capstone Project.

Refining the Course

We are in the midst of running the course for a second time. As we planned for this iteration, perhaps the most important aspect of the course we addressed was the level of complexity. In 2014, we leapt in with both feet and deliberately chose to incorporate a good deal of technology—some of which neither of us was familiar—all in one go. In some regards, we got carried away with the “Fascinating Technologies” (the title of the humanities colloquium at which we presented with some of our students). We recognized, in some instances, a return to the basics and away from some of the more distracting technologies would better serve our students. This time, the course was streamlined somewhat, building on the technology that worked best (e.g., the peer-editing process) and leaving out what did not work as well (e.g., video-conferencing), especially in a course with challenging theoretical content.

In addition to making technological changes, we have increased the focus given to information literacy skills. In 2014, a total of six hours of instruction time was devoted to search skills (two hours), curating a scholarly profile (two hours), and scholarly communication (two hours). In the 2016 version of the course, 7.5 hours is now used for expanded information literacy and writing instruction, including search skills, topic and question development, source evaluation, and proposal writing. A further 1.5 hours for scholarly communication and 1.5 hours for curating a scholarly profile online round out the information literacy portion of instruction.

In the current iteration of the course, assignments have also been added to enhance the information literacy skills espoused by the ACRL Framework and the writing skills discussed in the WPA Framework. Prior to discussing the steps scholars walk through when initially undertaking research, we asked the students to reflect on their own research and writing processes in the form of a short reflection paper. Students wrote about how they select a research topic and a question, their strategies for finding secondary sources, their motivations for selecting the citations they use, and their own writing process,
among other questions. From this metacognitive exercise, one at the heart of both Frameworks, we noticed the class is almost perfectly divided in the approach taken to developing a research question. Half of the class formulate a question and then go to the published literature, while the other half start exploring literature and allow their question to develop from there. Out of this observation, we were able to discuss the implications of conducting research in both fashions.

In addition to adding a reflection paper, the second version of this course saw us expand upon the success of the collegial peer-review final essay process and bring this approach to paper proposals. In the first version of the course only the instructors saw final essay proposals. This time, students paired up with their classmates to discuss proposals and give each other feedback in class. This change was made to give students an additional opportunity to work collaboratively, as they will be commonly required to do in post-undergraduate employment. The exercise promotes what the WPA Framework labels as “openness” in writing, by encouraging students to “listen to and reflect on the ideas and responses of others….to their writing.” Additionally, it strengthened the quality of proposals, a type of writing with which most students in the class were unfamiliar. We also asked students to be “flexible” in crafting their proposals and to “reflect on the choices they [made] in light of context, purpose, and audience.” Dawn discussed her experience with writing proposals read by people from different disciplines or outside of academia and how this changes the content and tone of her writing. As indicated, the change to the course to allow for an additional opportunity for collaboration between students answers the WPA Framework’s call for instructors to help students “develop flexible writing processes” by working with each other.

As requested by students in the 2014 version of the course, we continued to work on integrating our individual subject expertise into a fluid and dynamic back-and-forth style of instruction. Exploring how researchers go about defining new research projects for themselves served as example of strong, integrated instruction. For example, in one of our class meetings on research methods, Dawn began by leading the class in brainstorming areas of research interest on Frankenstein and arriving at a specific research question. Kathleen then led students through search techniques that would best get students connected to the literature they required for the question selected. We both talked about evaluating sources: Kathleen from a general library perspective covering authority and the peer-review process and Dawn from a disciplinary perspective of evaluating critics’ use of theoretical positions. Next, Kathleen introduced citation management software, then Dawn brought all the parts together in a discussion of how to create an effective research proposal.

Both the enhanced information literacy content and the more fluid back-and-forth approach in 2016 are bolstered by a deepened relationship between
librarian and disciplinary faculty this time around. Coming from a library without previous experience working so closely with a faculty member in a classroom, Kathleen found one of the most difficult aspects of embedded librarianship is walking a delicate balance between selling the skills librarians can bring to the classroom and not overstepping boundaries, which is highly variable depending on each partner. In 2014, despite Dawn’s repeated and genuine requests for input, Kathleen didn’t want to make her feel like she was taking over too much of her turf or asking for too much time in the classroom. As we continued to work together and established deeper trust and respect, it became much easier for Kathleen to offer her thoughts on the design of the course and feel like a full partner in the endeavor.

The Course in the Context of ACRL Frames

At the same time the first iteration of this course was being taught, the ACRL was revising its information literacy standards following increasing calls by librarians for redefinition and reframing. As the first edition of ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (2000) aged, they were critiqued by many librarians for being too specific and prescriptive. Scholars increasingly talked of “critical information literacy” and proposed new definitions and conceptions of information literacy that went beyond traditional library and research skills. Online, the #critlib Twitter community was born. Recognizing the need for an update, the ACRL struck a task force in 2013 and charged it with significantly revising the Standards. Throughout 2014, the Task Force released three drafts, each a significant departure from the 2000 Standards.

The ACRL Framework emphasizes six threshold concepts, or frames, which it defined as “those critical gateway or portal concepts through which students must pass in order to develop genuine expertise within a discipline, profession, or knowledge domain.” The six threshold concepts are as follows:

- Authority Is Constructed and Contextual
- Information Creation as a Process
- Information Has Value
- Research as Inquiry
- Scholarship as Conversation
- Searching as Strategic Exploration

The new frames permit a broader understanding of information literacy as including social and technical practices and dispositions, in line with what scholars have articulated through concepts such as “metaliteracy” and infor-
mation literacy as a “sociotechnical practice.” The frames allow teaching and librarian faculty to conceptualize information literacy as a set of skills developed over the course of a student’s time at an institution.

We were midway through our 2014 version of the course when the third draft of the ACRL Framework was released by the task force. Immediately, we saw many of the ideas in this document were already in action in our course. The text provided us with a richer understanding of what information literacy is and why collaborations such as the one we are involved in are critical to the work of librarians and teachers alike. The old Standards felt restrictive and as if they were pass/fail skills. The new ACRL Framework emphasizes the development of information literacy is a process occurring over time, and it feels more flexible in terms of the pathways in which students enhance their information literacy. In shedding restrictive directives, however, the ACRL Framework has been critiqued for leaving librarians without a clear path forward for information literacy instruction. We realized we were in the process of finding just such a path.

Our partnership suggested how the new document can be deployed in an embedded librarian setting. While all of the frames are relevant to our course, two in particular are the most relevant to contextualize and ground what occurs in our course: “Information Creation as Process” and “Scholarship Is a Conversation.”

**Information Creation as a Process**

“Information Creation as a Process,” according to the ACRL Framework, “refers to the understanding that the purpose, message, and delivery of information are intentional acts of creation. Recognizing the nature of information creation, experts look to the underlying processes of creation as well as the final product to critically evaluate the usefulness of the information.” In our course, Dawn explored how academics create meaning and messages in the study of literature. Both Dawn and Kathleen explored the development of research questions and information literacy for research methods. Kathleen then followed up by guiding students to an understanding of how scholarship moves from the idea phase to the transmission of an intellectual product. In particular, the peer-review process exercise was helpful to explore the act of shaping scholarship.

Often in research methods classes, the focus is on the collection and analysis of research data, and how these analyses enter into scholarly and public discourse is not discussed. We really wanted the students to walk away from the course with an understanding that while the dissemination of traditional papers still has value for getting work in front of other academics, there are other models of publishing work needing to be considered apart from tradi-
tional peer-reviewed journal articles and books. In class, we explored different models for communication through a discussion of building an online scholarly profile. Key to success in developing a well-rounded profile is the ability to repackage work for different audiences. We discussed blogging, tweeting, posting videos online, composing multimedia oral presentations, and the previously mentioned digital humanities websites, and interactive e-books. Whether students go on in academia or not wasn’t important; we stressed learning to present information in different ways is a critical job skill.

Scholarship Is a Conversation

The second ACRL principle, “Scholarship Is a Conversation,” “refers to the idea of sustained discourse within a community of scholars, researchers, or professionals, with new insights and discoveries occurring over time as a result of competing perspectives and interpretations.” Dawn led the students in an exploration of how various authors, literary critics, and literary theorists engage with each other and with texts in order to develop and build scholarship. Kathleen introduced the students to non-traditional forms of conversations via digital humanities projects. Together, we built the course to reinforce the idea that scholarship is an ongoing conversation, and we tried to help students build skills in this area.

Both the content and structure of the course were designed to model current and emerging forms of scholarly communication. With regard to content, we posited those relationships between literature, criticism, and literary theory precisely as a conversation. Texts in all three categories are talking to each other. Some talk about cultural issues of concern, such as in *Frankenstein*, the ethical limits of scientific experimentation, and some talk about other texts. During research skills sessions, we explored how scholars engage each other through an exploration of tracking citations backwards via bibliographies and forwards through the use of Google Scholar’s “Cited By” feature. Modeling how scholars communicate was infused into the structure of the course through assignments, such as learning collaborative skills in the peer-review essay and proposal requirements, and via the technological aspects of the course, including working collaboratively via videoconferencing and online in small groups.

Conclusion

The WPA and the ACRL Framework, taken together, offer a new avenue for understanding research-writing and new opportunities for both teachers and librarians to assist students in enhancing their information literacy skills. One
highly effective way to do so is for librarians to partner with disciplinary faculty, creating dynamic instruction duos. The ACRL Framework recognizes this, highlighting the need for teaching and librarian faculty to work together to assist students in deepening their information literacy by issuing a challenge:

Teaching faculty have a greater responsibility in designing curricula and assignments that foster enhanced engagement with the core ideas about information and scholarship within their disciplines. Librarians have a greater responsibility in identifying core ideas within their own knowledge domain that can extend learning for students, in creating a new cohesive curriculum for information literacy, and in collaborating more extensively with faculty.30

Collaboration at all stages of our course has opened a space for one librarian and one disciplinary faculty member to engage students more effectively than either individual could have done alone. While embedded librarianship is not a new practice, more attention should be paid to specifically embedding librarians in research methods courses. Regardless of academic discipline, this type of course is an ideal site to form librarian-faculty partnerships. Research methods curricula are a natural place to assist students in advancing their information literacy capacities and engage students in a discussion of the complex and constantly changing scholarly communication environment.

Notes


13. WPA, Framework, 10.


15. Ibid., 6.

16. The colloquium was recorded and is available at: http://viuspace.viu.ca/handle/10613/2485.

17. WPA, Framework, 4.

18. Ibid., 5.

19. Ibid., 8.


24. ACRL, Framework, 12.

25. Ibid., 2.

27. Tuominen, Savolainen, and Talja, “Information Literacy as a Sociotechnical Practice.”


29. Ibid., 8.

30. Ibid., 2.

**Bibliography**


