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An Assessment of Education and Training Needs for Bibliographic Instruction Librarians

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Abstract

A study was conducted in 1986 by the Education and Library Use Committee of the Wisconsin Association of Academic Librarians to determine the educational backgrounds and characteristics of bibliographic instruction (BI) librarians in Wisconsin. The results of the survey indicated that the education for BI has been insufficient and that there is a very real need for additional and/or supplemental education in this area. The methods most preferred for educational enhancement are self-study and workshops. A recommendation was made for one approach to resolving the dilemma: offering a series of courses, in the form of one- to three-day seminars, through the University of Wisconsin Certificate of Professional Development Program. This organized program of study now offers a bibliographic instruction track, consisting of four core courses, which is to be supplemented with additional electives. Until such time as library instruction is standard fare and fully integrated into our library school offerings, it is the hope that this approach may serve as a model for one method of accommodating the educational needs of instruction librarians.

The importance of library instruction in academic libraries is well established, and its theory and practice continue to develop. It is expected of nearly every public service librarian and from a growing number of librarians in other service areas as well. Yet even with the well-established place of library instruction within the profession, the education and training of instruction librarians is sorely lacking. There seems to be no consensus as to whether formalized education devoted to this area of librarianship is indeed even warranted.

The problem has been chronicled repeatedly in the literature for over ten years.[1] Library school offerings that are relevant to BI are still quite limited. Very often BI is treated only as a component of another course, and those schools that do offer full courses are relatively few in number. In 1984 the great majority of library schools (91%) had integrated bibliographic instruction into existing courses, with 32% offering a separate course. Nine percent had no BI components in their curriculum. In 1986 there was a significantly greater proportion of library schools offering no BI in their curriculum (33%) as well as a decline in those schools offering a separate course (26%).[2]

Reasons cited for the reluctance of library schools to incorporate courses in bibliographic instruction are numerous, including:
- a hesitancy to cross over into the "territory" of education departments;
- too broad a scope to be covered in a single course (adequate coverage of the subject would require additional courses, thereby preempting other, "necessary" courses);
- disagreement on the material to be covered (i.e., theory or practice);
- inability of existing library school faculty to teach such a course; and
- lack of demand from library school students, due, in part at least, to an unfamiliarity with career expectations.[3]

Yet in spite of this lack of formal training, libraries, as employers, insist on "knowledge of" or "experience in" bibliographic instruction when hiring reference/public service positions. In a study of the amount and importance of various professional knowledge bases among academic librarians, library instruction ranked 19th of 56 and was measured in importance at 2.55 on a 5-point scale (1 = essential, 5 = of no importance).[4] The new graduate is faced with a very real dilemma, one apparent upon first glance at a few position announcements.

So how do we approach this problem? Do we first encourage employers to demand specified prerequisites of instruction librarians, thereby demonstrating to the library schools the need for such training? Or, conversely, do we first approach the library schools to establish appropriate courses for training instruction librarians so that employers have some basis on which to require previous knowledge?

Supplementary educational opportunities for instruction librarians are indeed available, but they tend not to be offered in any systematic fashion. This often results in duplication and/or omission of key points or concepts, not to mention uneven emphasis on the theories, philosophies, and practice of bibliographic instruction. Such uneven coverage may be compensated for over time, but often only through years spent attending conferences, workshops and seminars, reading independently, talking and meeting with peers, etc. Given this situation, an alternative and/or supplemental means of preparing BI librarians would seem to be appropriate.

Methodology

A survey was conducted in 1986 by the Education and Library Use Committee of the Wisconsin Association of Academic Librarians (W\AL). The purpose of the study was to determine the general and educational background characteristics of bibliographic instruction librarians in Wisconsin, to identify the extent of their BI activities, and to gather information that would provide a basis for the development of future offerings in the education of instruction librarians. Questionnaires, adapted from that used by Smith,[5] were mailed to each of the 400 members of WAAL. Members of this group represent college, university, vocational/ technical, junior college, and special libraries. Only those librarians with library instruction experience were asked to complete the survey; those without the relevant experience were asked to return the form unanswered.

The survey tool (see appendix A) consisted of thirty questions designed to provide data to meet the following objectives:
1. To determine the methods and the extent of bibliographic instruction currently being practiced among instruction librarians;
2. To determine if librarians engaged in bibliographic instruction received relevant education and training, particularly in learning theory, teaching methodology, and/or instructional development;
3. To determine how the education, training, and experience related to bibliographic instruction were gained;
4. To identify education and training needs of bibliographic instruction librarians and appropriate methods of achieving them; and
5. To gather limited demographic information about the population.

Results

Of the 400 questionnaires mailed, 180 responses were received, representing a 45% return rate. Of these responses, 68 (38%) were returned blank, indicating that 112 (62%) of the respondents had been or were presently involved in library instruction activities.

Two-thirds of the instruction librarians in Wisconsin are over forty years old; only 5% are under thirty. Seventy percent received their library science degrees over ten years ago and 13% are recent graduates, having earned their degrees in the past four years. They are practicing instruction in all types of institutions (including junior college, vocational/ technical college, and special libraries), though by far the majority (86%) are in college and university libraries. (See table 1).

Table 1. *Demographic Characteristics (N = 112)*

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
Age		
20-29	6	5
30-39	36	32
40-49	40	36
50 or older	29	26
No response	1	--
Years since M.L.S. degree earned		
0-4	14	13
5-9	19	17
10-14	39	35
15-19	23	21
20 or more	15	14
No response	2	--
Years involved in instruction activities		
0-2	14	13
3-5	26	24
6-8	24	22
9-11	13	12
12 or more	32	29
No response	3	--
Library instruction assignment*		
Full-time	1	1
Half-time	3	3
Less than half-time	106	96
No response	2	--
Type of library		
Junior college	3	3
Vocational/technical	6	5
College	26	23
University	70	63
Special	3	3
Other	4	4

Note: Rounding errors account for column totals not equaling 100%.
*Ninety-four percent of respondents are full-time employees.

Sixty-three percent of these librarians have been engaged in bibliographic instruction activities for six or more years, leaving 37% who have been involved less than six years; 13% have been practicing library instruction less than three years. Nearly all are full-time employees practicing BI less than half-time. The job-related duties of instruction librarians fall into all service areas, though collectively they have principal assignments in reference (representing 30% of their duties), administration (24%), and instruction (12%). Interestingly, only 57% of the respondents indicated a proportion of time specifically devoted to instruction activities. (However, this may be partially explained by the typically close association with reference, making the distinction between the two difficult to determine.) This group devoted an average of 34% of their time to instruction activities and 43% to administrative duties. In addition to the proportion of time spent on instruction activities, the extent of the various types and modes of instruction was determined. As expected, course-related instruction is the most prevalent type of instruction. It is practiced by 70% of the respondents and accounts for 49% of the total population's instruction activities. Instruction that is unrelated to a specific course (e.g., orientations, handouts) is

used by 68% of the respondents, accounting for 25% of the activities. All the various modes of instruction are evident in the activities of these librarians. The modes of instruction used most extensively are (1) the production of handouts and guides and (2) the single lecture; each of these was reported by 87% of the population. These formats were followed, in order of use, by the presentation of guided tours (82%), audiovisual presentations (38%), a series of lectures (26%), a self-paced guide or workbook (23%), credit courses (12%), and computer-assisted instruction (8%). (See table 2).

Table 2. *Extent of Library Instruction Activities* **(N = 112)**

Proportions of job-related duties			
	Frequency	% of activities among respondents	% of activities of entire sample population
Duty			
Acquisitions	43	18	7
Administration	58	43	24
Automation/Systems	26	19	5
Cataloging	28	29	8
Circulation	21	14	3
Instruction	60	20	12
Reference	92	34	30
Other	41	26	10
No response	6	--	--
Type of instruction			
Type			
Unrelated to specific course	76	35	25
Course-related	88	59	49
Course-integrated	45	39	17
Credit course	12	36	4
No response	5	--	--
Modes of instruction used			
	Frequency	% of respondents	
Mode			
Handouts/guides	94	87	
Guided tours	78	72	
Self-paced guide/workbook	25	23	
Computer-assisted program	9	8	
Audiovisual presentation	41	38	
Single lecture	94	87	
Series of lectures	28	26	
Credit course	13	12	
Other	10	9	
No response	4	--	
Column totals do not equal 100 percent due to rounding errors and responses not totaling 100 percent.			

The education and training backgrounds of these librarians, as they pertain to library instruction, are very diverse. Sixty percent indicate some knowledge of learning theory, teaching methodology, and/or instructional development. This knowledge was most often received as a component part of a formal program of study. Only sixteen individuals received it as part of their library science master's degree program, and eleven of them had had prior education in these areas in their undergraduate program. All but one of these sixteen earned their library science degrees ten or more years ago. Even with the increase of BI responsibilities among librarians in all service areas, no recent graduates have incorporated such back- ground knowledge directly with their library science program.

The most frequently reported method of preparation or training for BI was through self-study (83% of the respondents), followed by attendance at workshops (62%) and conferences (60%). Most respondents indicated that several methods were employed. Whereas the frequency of use of these methods of preparation gives some indication of their perceived value, respondents were also asked which one method they considered to have been the primary means by which they gained knowledge relevant to bibliographic instruction. The method most often cited as primary was self-study (reported by 52% of the population), whereas only 16% considered workshops to have been their primary means and only 9% conference programs. That these methods are the most used is supported by the amount of reading that these librarians engage in and by their professional involvement. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents regularly read three or more library-oriented journals, and 91% belong to two or more library-related professional organizations, with 35% belonging to four or more. Forty-eight percent regularly read at least one education-oriented journal and 22% belong to two or more education-related professional organizations. Prior teaching experience, either elementary, secondary or college level, was reported by 54% of the respondents.

The wide variety of educational backgrounds of these librarians clearly demonstrates the fragmented nature of acquiring a knowledge base for library instruction. Compounding this fragmentation is the lack of a standard body of knowledge for the field. More than half (52%) of the respondents felt they were not adequately prepared to undertake their responsibilities when they first became involved in bibliographic instruction. Only 38% of the respondents felt they were adequately prepared, and 10% were undecided. This situation further supports the need for a more systematic method of educating and preparing instruction librarians for the duties they will assume.

Those areas for future education or training for BI that were identified as being most beneficial are, in order of preference: (1) program development and management, (2) teaching methodology, (3) instructional development, and (4) learning theory. As to the format of presentation for learning these skills and concepts, the most preferred methods of preparation for librarians new to bibliographic instruction are ranked as follows: (1) workshops, (2) in-service training programs, (3) previous teaching experience, and (4) credit courses. For those librarians already practicing BI, the most preferred methods of keeping abreast of new developments and further refining their skills are: (1) workshops, (2) in-service training programs, (3) conferences, and (4) self-study.

Conclusions
The survey indicated that a large proportion of practicing librarians received their library science education quite some time ago. With such tremendous growth in the field of library instruction, it is difficult to maintain a thorough, well-rounded awareness and knowledge of continuing developments and practices. Self-study and workshops, the methods most frequently employed both to learn about BI initially and to keep abreast of new trends, are often insufficient, depending upon chance and availability. Formal programs of study account for a very small percentage of appropriate educational

background that relates educational theories and librarianship, and no such background was reported among recent graduates. Proficiencies for practicing library instruction may very well accumulate over time, through various methods, but there are no assurances that the necessary skills and knowledge will be obtained by all those who will be practicing library instruction. A list of proficiencies has been compiled,[6] which indicates some progress toward the necessary standardization, but the means of gaining these proficiencies and of ensuring that they are being obtained by all instruction librarians are not yet in place.

As one more step toward this goal, a recommendation was forwarded to the University of Wisconsin-Extension, Communication Programs office to develop courses that would be offered through the Certificate of Professional Development Program (now offered through the University of Wisconsin-Madison, School of Library and Information Studies, Continuing Education Services). This program provides an organized continuing education curriculum structured with required and elective courses. The courses are presented in the form of one- to three-day seminars, with each course providing designated Continuing Education Units (CEUs). Upon completion of the specified series of courses and a minimum of twelve CEUs, participants receive a Certificate of Professional Development. Based on the results of the survey, a trial course, entitled "Methods and Techniques of Bibliographic Instruction," was offered in the fall of 1987. The enrollment in this course was enough to establish a full Certificate of Professional Development in Bibliographic Instruction program. This and three other courses - "Program Design and Development of Library Services," "Teaching Methods and Learning Theory," and "Research Strategies for Bibliographic Instruction" - compose the required core courses for this certificate.

As the theories, philosophies, and practice of bibliographic instruction develop, it becomes apparent that a fuller and more complete comprehension of the teaching function in librarianship is vitally important. This study has revealed a very real interest and need for a more satisfactory means of preparing librarians to teach library use. Given the widespread practice of BI and the inadequacy of our present situation, this course of action may serve as a model for one more approach to accommodate the educational needs of instruction librarians and present some progress in providing bibliographic instruction its rightful place in library education.

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2. Larson and Meltzer, p. 13-1 4.

3. Brundin, p.180-81; Larson and Meltzer, p.11-12.

4. Powell, R., and Creth, S., "Knowledge Bases and Library Education," *College & Research Libraries* 47:16-27 (January 1986).

5. Smith, B., "Education and Training Characteristics of Librarians Engaged in Bibliographic Instruction in Eighteen Colleges and Universities in Pennsylvania" (Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1981).

6. Association of College and Research Libraries, Bibliographic Instruction Section, Education for Bibliographic Instruction Committee, "Proficiencies for Bibliographic Instruction Librarians" (Chicago: American Library Assn., 1985).

Appendix A.
Questionnaire: Education and Training Needs of Instruction Librarians

Note: This questionnaire is intended for librarians who have had experience in bibliographic instruction, either currently or in the past. If you have not had such experience, please do not complete the questionnaire, and return it unanswered in the enclosed envelope.

Thank you!

1. How many years have you been engaged in bibliographic instruction activities?

   _____ 0 – 2 years   _____ 9 – 11 years

   _____ 3 – 5 years   _____ 12 or more years

   _____ 6 – 8 years

2. How much of your assigned time in the past two years was devoted to bibliographic instruction?

   _____ Full-time   _____ Half-time   _____ Less than half-time

3. Are you a full-time employee?

   _____ Yes   _____ No

4. What proportion of your job-related duties is devoted to each of the following assignments (should equal 100%)?

   _____ Acquisitions   _____ Circulation

   _____ Administration   _____ Instruction

   _____ Automation/Systems   _____ Reference

   _____ Cataloging   _____ Other (specify) _____

5. What modes of instruction are you using?

   _____ Handouts/guides (use of single source, specific activity, or specific area of library)

   _____ Guided tour

   _____ Self-paced guide/workbook (series of activities/exercises) – print form

   _____ Computer-assisted programs

   _____ Audiovisual presentations

   _____ Single lecture

   _____ Series of lectures

   _____ Credit course

   _____ Other (specify) _____

6. What percentage of your instruction activities are:

   _____ unrelated to a specific course (i.e., orientations, handouts, etc.)

   _____ course-related

   _____ course-integrated

   _____ credit course

7. How many years ago did you earn your master's degree in library science?

   _____ 0 – 4 years   _____ 15 – 19 years

   _____ 5 – 9 years   _____ 20 or more years

   _____ 10 – 14 years

8. In your work toward your master's degree in library science, in which area of librarianship did you concentrate?

   _____Acquisitions   _____ Reference

   _____ Administration   _____ Other (specify) _____

   _____ Automation   _____ No concentration

   _____ Cataloging

9. Have you had any education or training in learning theory, teaching methodology, or instructional development?

   _____ Yes   _____ No   _____ Don't know

10. If you answered "Yes" to item 9, was this knowledge gained through any of the following (check all that apply)? If you answered "No" or "Don't know" to item 9, proceed to item 11.

   _____ Undergraduate degree coursework

   _____ Library science master's degree program

   _____Post-master's advanced study program

   _____ Master's degree program, other than library science (specify discipline) _____

   _____ Doctoral degree program (specify discipline) _____

11. Was any specific training beyond the master's degree in library science required by your library to qualify you for bibliographic instruction activities?

   _____ Yes   _____ No   _____ Don't know

12. In which of the following additional methods of preparation/training for bibliographic instruction have you participated?

   _____ Self-study   _____ Credit courses

   _____In-service training   _____ Other

   _____ Workshops   _____ None

   _____ Conference programs

13. If you checked any of the selections listed in item 12, did you participate in these activities before or after you became involved in bibliographic instruction? If you checked "None" in item 12, proceed to item 15.

   _____ Before   _____ After   _____ Both before and after

14. Which *one* method (excluding formal education programs) would you say is the *primary* means by which you have gained knowledge and information relevant to bibliographic instruction?

   _____Self-study   _____Conference programs

   _____ In-service training   _____ Credit courses

   _____ Workshops   _____ Other

15. You are a member of how many library-related professional organizations?

_____ 0 – 1 _____ 4 – 5

_____ 2 – 3 _____ 6 or more

16. You are a member of how many education-related professional organizations?

_____ 0 – 1 _____ 4 – 5

_____ 2 – 3 _____ 6 or more

17. How many library-oriented journals do you read regularly (i.e., every issue)?

_____ 0 _____ 2

_____ 1 _____ 3 or more

18. How many education-oriented journals do you read regularly (i.e., every issue)?

_____ 0 _____ 2

_____ 1 _____ 3 or more

19. Did you teach at the college level prior to your involvement in bibliographic instruction?

_____ Yes _____ No

20. Did you teach at the elementary or secondary school level prior to your participation in bibliographic instruction?

_____ Yes _____ No

21. Would you say that you were adequately prepared to undertake your responsibilities when you *first* became involved in bibliographic instruction?

_____ Yes _____ No _____ Undecided

22. Do you *now* feel qualified to provide the type(s) of bibliographic instruction required of you at your institution?

_____ Yes _____ No _____ Undecided

23. If you had an opportunity for additional education or training relevant to library instruction, which area(s) do you think would benefit from most? Please rank the following choices, with "1" being most beneficial; if none needed, simply mark the appropriate space.

_____ Instructional development

_____ Learning theory

_____ Program development/management

_____ Teaching methodology

_____ Other (specify) _____

_____ None needed

24. Which method(s) would you say offer(s) the best means of preparation for librarians new to bibliographic instruction? Please rank the following choices, with "1" being most preferred; if you *dislike* any of the choices, indicate with a "0."

_____ Self-study

_____ In-service training

_____ Conferences

_____ Workshops

_____ Credit courses

_____ Advanced study programs (organized program of courses)

_____ Previous teaching experience

_____ Other (specify) _____

25. Which of the following methods do you see as most desirable for presenting instruction-related knowledge and information to other librarians already involved in bibliographic instruction? Please rank the following choices, with "1" being most desirable; if you *dislike* any of the choices, indicate with a "0."

_____ Self-study

_____ In-service training

_____ Conferences

_____ Workshops

_____ Credit courses

_____ Advanced study programs (organized program of courses)

_____ Other (specify) _____

26. Would you say that your library administration is supportive of a bibliographic instruction program?

_____ Yes   _____ No   _____ Undecided

27. Are you aware of the Certificate of Professional Development Program offered by the University of Wisconsin – Extension?

_____ Yes   _____ No

28. If you answered "Yes" to item 27, do you think such a format is appropriate for educating and training instruction librarians? If you answered "No" to item 27, proceed to item 29.

_____ Yes   _____ No   _____ Undecided

29. In what type of institution are you currently employed?

_____ Junior college library

_____ Vocational/technical college library

_____ College library

_____ University library

_____ Special library

_____ Other

30. What is your age?

_____ 20 – 29   _____ 40 – 49

_____ 30 – 39   _____ 50 or older

31. Comments: