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Kelly Heider, *Indiana University of Pennsylvania*



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Ten Tips for Implementing a Successful Embedded Librarian Program

KELLY L. HEIDER

Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA

In January of 2006, Indiana University of Pennsylvania Libraries began a successful embedded librarian program in the university's College of Education and Educational Technology. The program has improved the library's relationship with faculty and students; shaped a more relevant collection of print, media, and electronic resources that meets curriculum, instruction, and research needs; created opportunities for college/university library collaboration through new programs, team-teaching, and scholarly endeavors; and, most importantly, improved the quality of teaching and learning in the College of Education. The following article outlines the strategies IUP Libraries used to hire an embedded librarian, develop that librarian's presence in the College of Education and, ultimately, strengthen the working relationship between the university library and the college.

Introduction

Indiana University of Pennsylvania is the fifth-largest university in the state and the only university in Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education to offer doctoral programs. It houses over 140 undergraduate degree programs, a nationally-recognized honors college, and more than seventy graduate programs (Indiana University of PA, 2010). The university's library system (IUP Libraries) includes Stapleton Library, located on main campus, Orendorff Music Library, also located on main campus, the Punxsutawney Branch Campus Library, and the Northpointe Branch Campus Library. Stapleton Library houses the main book and periodical collections, technical and public services, special collections and university archives, and media resources and services. The entire library system holds over 800,000 volumes and more than 50,000 audiovisual items. In addition, the system subscribes to more than 16,000 journals and

other serial publications. Currently, IUP Libraries employs 15 faculty librarians, 2 managers, 19 staff members, and approximately 150 student workers (Indiana University of PA Libraries, 2010).

IUP Libraries administers the LibQUAL+ web-based survey to its undergraduate, graduate, and faculty patrons every two to three years. LibQUAL+, developed by the Association of Research Libraries, assists libraries in soliciting, tracking, understanding, and acting upon users' opinions of service quality (ARL, 2009). The data from IUP Libraries' first LibQUAL+ survey, administered in 2004, showed dissatisfaction from students and faculty in the university's College of Education and Educational Technology. Specifically, these patrons were unhappy with reference librarians who did not have a background in education and non-existent or out-of-date education resources. To address these deficits in service and resources, IUP's Dean of Libraries proposed the creation of a "college" librarian position. After funding for the position was obtained in 2005, IUP Libraries formed a search committee for its new education librarian. She was hired in late fall of 2005 and began working for the university at the beginning of the spring 2006 semester. According to Shumaker (2009), "many embedded library service relationships are established because of customer initiatives or external events," such as the 2004 LibQUAL+ survey (p. 241).

Five years after IUP Libraries' initial LibQUAL+ survey, the results of the 2009 survey showed marked improvement in the satisfaction of students and faculty in the College of Education and Educational Technology. In fact, several COE-ET students and faculty members mentioned the education librarian by name in the open-ended portion of the LibQUAL+ survey,

commenting on her positive contributions to the mission of the college. One faculty member wrote, “[The education librarian] has been a great help to me and to my graduate students for the past five years or so. Thank you!”

The success of IUP Libraries’ college, or *embedded* (as it is most often referred to today) librarian program, is the result of careful planning and hard work on the part of IUP Libraries’ former dean, the education librarian search committee, and the current education librarian. The rest of this article outlines the embedded librarian program at IUP and offers ten tips for other academic libraries interested in implementing successful embedded librarian programs of their own.

Searching for and Hiring an Embedded Librarian

Tip #1: Make sure you have buy-in from all stakeholders. *Buy-in* is defined as “commitment to achieving a shared goal” (Encarta, 2009). In the case of Indiana University of PA, the goal was finding a librarian who would serve as liaison between the university library and the College of Education for the purpose of improving the library’s relationship with the college, thereby improving the library’s print and digital collections as well as the quality of College of Education faculty and student research. Although the idea to hire an education librarian originated within the university library, the former Dean of IUP Libraries recognized the importance of involving other stakeholders in the hiring process. Meetings were held with the Dean of the College of Education, COE faculty, and library faculty to explain the embedded librarian concept and form a search committee to draft a job description. The final draft of the job description (see Appendix A) represented the “wish list” of all involved parties.

Tip#2: Include college/department faculty in the interview process. In addition to having input in the education librarian's job description, IUP's College of Education was also invited to participate in the interview process. As part of the interview, candidates for the position were required to make a presentation on IUP Libraries' undergraduate and graduate resources. Administrators and faculty members in the College of Education were invited to sit in on these presentations. The findings of a qualitative study conducted by Person and Newman (1990) suggest that searches for university librarians are more successful if three major constituent groups, including librarians, college faculty, and administrators, are involved in the hiring process. Because all stakeholders were involved in the hiring process at IUP, the search for an embedded librarian ended successfully and created a welcoming atmosphere for the new education librarian.

Tip #3: Look for the following qualities/qualifications in an embedded librarian:

- A. Leadership ability-** One of the biggest challenges academic libraries face is finding a way to market their services to faculty and students. According to the American Marketing Association, "marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders" (Gundlach, 2007, p. 243). Embedded librarians act as marketing managers, estimating the demand for products and services (library resources) and identifying potential markets (colleges or departments) for those products and services. In order to identify the need for library resources, an embedded librarian

must participate in activities and initiatives outside the library. Often, this means accepting department, college, and university-wide leadership roles. “Librarians must take it upon themselves to establish an acute sense of important campus agendas and propose involvement including reasons why their perspective is important. A proactive approach is essential in getting one or more seats at the right tables rather than waiting to be asked” (Dewey, 2004, p. 10). IUP’s Education Librarian serves on two university-wide committees, coordinates a university-wide speaker series, and is a regular contributor to another university-wide program. In addition, she holds a fundraiser twice a year that benefits the university library and the College of Education and coordinates two programs that provide service learning hours for students in the COE.

B. Strong advocate for both the library and the college/department he/she will serve-

The current state of the economy has led to shrinking college and university budgets nationwide. As a result, academic libraries are being asked to cut both resources and services. Therefore, many embedded librarians find themselves in a position where they are being asked to recommend which resources and services their departments/college can do without. “Only when the information center has strong advocates within itself and in other areas of the organization will it be able to thrive and grow” (Jones in St. Clair, 1994, xiv). It is crucial that embedded librarians work closely with college faculty to identify essential resources and services and stress their importance to faculty teaching and student learning while, at the same time, understanding that the university library serves many colleges which all have their

own unique needs. IUP's Education Librarian performs this extremely delicate balancing act through regular communication with College of Education faculty. Being able to pinpoint and prioritize a college's needs while remaining sensitive to the needs of other colleges is a set of skills that can only be developed through frequent exposure to people and programs outside the walls of the library.

C. *Experience with collaboration and outreach-* In 1998, the American Association of School Libraries published *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*. Prior to this publication, collaboration and outreach had been topics of discussion in public libraries only. Public libraries had to market their resources and services in order to get patrons to walk through their doors. School librarians, on the other hand, never felt as though they had to market their services, since students in K-12 schools were often required by their teachers to visit the library for silent reading materials, book reports, research papers, etc. However, the Information Age and the need for information literacy changed all of that. "Just as the school library media center has moved far beyond a room with books to become an active, technology-rich learning environment with an array of information resources, the school library media specialist today focuses on the process of learning rather than dissemination of information" (AASL, 1998, p. 1). Today's school librarian acts as both teacher and instructional partner, collaborating with students and members of the school community "to expand their general understanding of information issues and to provide them with specific opportunities to develop sophisticated skills in

information literacy, including the uses of information technology” (AASL, 1998, p. 4).

Only in recent years have academic libraries begun to understand the importance of collaboration and outreach. Students are entering college without the information literacy skills they need to produce quality work, and faculty are frustrated because students use Google as their source for scholarly research. Embedded librarians who have experience with collaboration and outreach not only partner with department faculty to teach undergraduate and graduate students the skills they need to locate and use information effectively, but they provide learning opportunities outside the walls of the classroom.

The education librarian at IUP worked as a school library media specialist for eight years before coming to the university. She collaborated on a daily basis with subject faculty and was regarded as both a teacher and an instructional partner by her students and colleagues. In addition, she provided outreach services to both the community and school through literacy and after-school library programs.

D. Graduate degree in the area he/she will serve- In order to have the knowledge base that is required to develop a subject-specific collection and teach program-specific information literacy skills, it is imperative that an embedded librarian hold an advanced degree in the area he/she will serve. Not only will the knowledge improve his/her quality of work, but it will garner respect from college faculty colleagues who have, historically, regarded librarians as skilled professionals but not as peers (Blake,

1995). Because IUP's Education Librarian holds a doctoral degree in education with a specialization in curriculum and instruction, she is viewed by College of Education faculty as an equal.

E. Prior work experience in the area he/she will serve- Besides having a related graduate degree, it is also helpful if an embedded librarian has prior work experience in the area he/she will serve. Professional knowledge helps embedded librarians mentor students and guide them to resources and services that will be invaluable to them throughout their career. For example, IUP's Education Librarian holds an undergraduate degree in English with secondary teacher certification. Her four years of experience as a middle and high school English teacher inspired her to develop a collaborative program called *Wild about Books*. *Wild about Books* gives students in the Early Childhood Education Program at IUP the opportunity to practice their literacy instruction skills by reading aloud and teaching mini-lessons to preschool children in the *Pre K Counts* program at the Indiana County Child Day Care Center. Not only do the student teachers benefit from the hands-on experience, but the preschool students benefit from the exposure to quality children's literature and teaching strategies that develop their emergent literacy skills. Drawing on her experience as a classroom teacher, the education librarian guides the early childhood education students through book selection, lesson planning, and lesson delivery.

Developing a Presence in the College/Department

Tip #4: Have a physical presence in the college/department a few days each week. According to Shumaker (2009), the phrase *embedded librarian* “comes from *embedded journalists*, and places a reference librarian right in the midst of where the user is to teach research skills whenever and wherever instruction is needed” (p. 239). The goal is to become a part of the college’s/department’s culture. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to work with, or in close proximity to, faculty and students on a regular basis. Siess (2003) claims that it is important to get out of the library and meet your “customers” face-to-face. “By taking the time and trouble to go to the customer, you are demonstrating that his or her needs are important to you—more important than whatever you were doing in the library itself” (p. 78).

IUP’s Education Librarian has two offices on campus—one in the College of Education and one in Stapleton Library. She spends two days a week in her college office and three days a week in her library office. Her presence in both buildings gives her the freedom to schedule a reference meeting in the location that is most convenient for the student or faculty member. Visibility in the College of Education also helps, since patrons are often reminded that they need assistance upon seeing the education librarian working in her satellite office. According to Siess (2003), “people who would never take the time to come into the library, send an e-mail, or even pick up the telephone to call you may stop you in the hall with a question” (p. 79).

Tip #5: Attend department meetings. Another way that an embedded librarian can have a physical presence in the college or department he/she serves is to attend department meetings, which IUP’s Education Librarian does on a regular basis. The benefits to department

meeting attendance are numerous. First, sitting in on meetings keeps the librarian abreast of new curricula, resource needs, and other issues affecting the department. It also gives department faculty the opportunity to request library support for research and instruction. Finally, attendance at department meetings allows the librarian to share new acquisitions, programs, and services with busy faculty who may not have the time to read library announcements published in a newsletter, sent through a campus listserv, or posted on the library's website.

Tip #6: Serve as bibliographer to college/department. The *liaison librarian* concept has been around for many years. In most academic libraries, collection development duties are assigned to librarians based on their expertise or interests. For example, an academic librarian who has an undergraduate or graduate degree in history may be assigned to order resources for the university library that support the history department's curricula. However, librarians who are not embedded in the culture of the college or department they serve do not know the curricula or the faculty members' research interests well enough to choose relevant resources. Shumaker (2009) claims that liaison librarians have been "library-focused, seeing collection development, not teaching or reference and research, as their primary role" (p. 240). He suggests a more "outwardly-focused" approach with embedded librarians "engaged in developing collaborative relationships with customer-partners" (p. 240).

In IUP's case, *liaison* is the word used to describe the department faculty member who works with the education librarian to review and choose resources that best support teaching and research. As Shumaker (2009) asserts, "the difference is between saying 'we'd like you to

help us build the library collection' and 'let's work together to achieve our mutual goals' " (p. 240).

Tip #7: Offer bibliographic instruction sessions and guest lectures at main campus, branch campuses, and centers. Traditionally, bibliographic instruction occurs in the library during orientation sessions in the summer or during the first week of class. Because this instruction occurs before students have a real need for library resources or services, the information presented by the librarian "goes in one ear and out the other." According to Roberts and Bhatt (2007), "too often, information literacy instruction is presented as a set of procedures for locating a hypothetical resource in the library. However, students are not interested in finding some resource randomly chosen as an example; they want to find a resource that they perceive as being important and useful" (p. 246). For this reason, information literacy instruction must occur at the student's point of need.

If an IUP College of Education faculty member contacts the education librarian to request a bibliographic instruction session, the first question she asks the faculty member is, "Are your students currently working on a research project?" If the answer is, "no," she asks the faculty member to wait and have her teach the class when the students have a research need. That way, she can tailor the instruction session to the specific information need, and students will retain the information because they immediately use the skills they learn to conduct their research.

Unfortunately, students at branch campuses and centers often struggle with research because there are no librarians (or possibly even a library) on site to help them. At IUP,

however, the education librarian is given the flexibility within her schedule to travel to branch campuses and centers in order to deliver bibliographic instruction and guest lectures on topics such as: choosing a dissertation topic, finding quality children's literature for use in the elementary classroom, and textbook evaluation. Her willingness to provide this service, as well as the library dean's willingness to allow her to provide this service, has had very positive results. In the open-ended portion of IUP's 2009 LibQUAL+ survey, one faculty member wrote, "I especially appreciate how [the education librarian] is willing to come to classes, even at remote sites, on a regular basis to assist with students' research needs. This has dramatically improved the quality of master's level research and other work, especially at those sites."

Strengthening the Working Relationship

Tip #8: Develop collaborative programs that utilize the library's resources for

college/department improvement. Not only is collaboration a great way to build a library's collection, but it is also a great way to make sure the library's collection is used. As mentioned earlier in this article, IUP's Education Librarian regularly works with both faculty and students in the Early Childhood Education Program and the teacher of the *Pre K Counts* program at the Indiana County Child Day Care Center (located on IUP's main campus) to provide opportunities for college students to obtain teaching experience and for preschool students to develop their emergent literacy skills. This is accomplished through the *Wild about Books* program (discussed under Tip #3, subsection E) and children's literature festivals. The education librarian has held two children's literature festivals at IUP since she was hired. In both cases, she served as a guide for early childhood education majors who planned and carried out the activities. Because

both the *Wild about Books* program and the children's literature festivals involve student teachers promoting literacy and a love of reading in the early childhood classroom, the Children's Collection in Stapleton Library gets a lot of use. Early childhood education majors quickly learn how to find children's books in the online catalog, how children's books are categorized in the collection, and how to evaluate the quality and appropriateness of children's books for use in the classroom.

Tip #9: Offer to teach credit courses for the college/department when department faculty are not available. Because of budget deficits brought on by a weak economy, many colleges and universities have lost faculty positions through attrition. Especially in the summer, when department faculty are taking family vacations or working on grants or scholarly publications, departments can find themselves short-handed. On two separate occasions, the Department of Professional Studies in Education (part of the College of Education at IUP) has asked the education librarian to teach summer courses for its Masters in Education Program. Because she holds a doctoral degree in education and works closely with Professional Studies faculty on a regular basis, the education librarian is not only familiar with the curriculum but eager to help out. Both the master's students and the education librarian benefitted from her willingness to teach summer courses. The students received some information literacy instruction along with the required course content, and the education librarian gained a greater understanding of the Master's in Education Program, which proved useful for collection development and the planning of future bibliographic instruction sessions.

Tip #10: Publish scholarly works and present at professional conferences with

college/department faculty. By holding an advanced degree and having prior work experience in the area they serve, as well as teaching credit courses for the department(s) they serve, embedded librarians gain the admiration and respect of their department colleagues. Another way embedded librarians can become respected colleagues and immerse themselves in the culture of the college/department is by offering to publish scholarly works and present at professional conferences with department faculty. “Discipline-specific conference attendance by academic librarians provides opportunities to interact with faculty in their disciplines that result in an increased communication with faculty, improved reference expertise, and more focused collection development” (Hankins, Melgoza, Seeger & Wan, 2009, p. 98). The education librarian at IUP has co-authored a book chapter and three peer-reviewed journal articles with College of Education faculty. In addition, she has co-presented at one regional and three state conferences. By working together on scholarly publications and presentations, embedded librarians and department faculty learn from each other. Librarians gain knowledge in the subject area, and department faculty strengthen their own information literacy skills.

Conclusion

The embedded librarian program at Indiana University of Pennsylvania has been successful for many reasons. First, careful planning went into searching for and hiring a librarian who possesses leadership ability, is passionate about the missions of both the university library and the College of Education, has experience working on collaborative projects, holds an advanced degree in education, and has prior teaching experience. Second, the education librarian has

been able to develop a presence in the College of Education because she attends department meetings, has a physical presence in the College of Education a few days each week, works with department liaisons to develop the library's collection, and offers bibliographic instruction at the point of need for not only main campus students, but branch campus and center students as well. Finally, IUP's Education Librarian has continued to strengthen her working relationship with the College of Education by developing collaborative programs with COE faculty and students, teaching credit courses for the College of Education, and working on scholarly endeavors with COE faculty. As one College of Education faculty member wrote in the open-ended portion of IUP's 2009 LibQUAL+ survey, "[The education librarian] has been a VERY valuable asset to our academic programs in education. She is very approachable, knowledgeable, and helpful to faculty and students. She provides information sessions for our new graduate students and supports students throughout their programs."

The addition of an embedded librarian has been a powerful marketing tool for IUP Libraries. In fact, "the power of embedding goes further than the library because it informs and improves the mission of the university for excellence in teaching and research. Recognition of the power of embedding, integrating, and collaborating leads to amazing innovations in the academy that would not exist without the influence and leadership of librarians" (Dewey, 2004, p. 16).

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Appendix A

Faculty Job Description for IUP's Education Librarian

Position Purpose: Serve as bibliographer and provide instruction, reference, web page development, and outreach services to faculty and students in the College of Education and Educational Technology.

- Serve as bibliographer for Education including the provision of specialized reference assistance and instruction and assistance in the selection of books and other materials for these departments, their faculty, and students.
- Strive to know the needs of the Education faculty and students and to identify new services to initiate or opportunities to integrate library and information services into the lives of the Education faculty and students in the College.
- Provide service to library users at the central reference desk as assigned, including rotating weekends.
- Promote information literacy and may teach general and specific bibliographic instruction sessions to individuals and groups; may include teaching credit courses.
- Organize and conduct workshops demonstrating new library resources to College faculty and students.
- Design and author pathfinders, web pages, or other aids to facilitate the use of the Library and its resources.
- Maintain professional currency and scholarly growth.
- Provide service to IUP Libraries, the university, the profession, and the community.
- Other duties as assigned.