

Valley City State University

Academic/Secondary Librarian Post Conference Reflection Paper

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A few years ago, as a professional learning community project, the two librarians at Bismarck High and I began working on steps to help our students for the next step in their academic or working careers. At the time we did not realize what an encompassing educational topic it was and would become. Our aim was to prepare our students so that they would have the skills to survive in a college library and competently navigate the steps involved in a college research paper. My college experience is still in my memory; it was very close to being dropped in the middle of a dark forest with a command to bring back several varieties of wood I knew nothing about. It did not take long to learn to love the woods. But I do not think anyone else should repeat the experience. There is too much to learn in college not to be prepared with as many advanced information literacy skills as possible. That is the calling for most of us as librarians. I am happy to see that as a profession we do not show signs of slowing down.

Two facts surprised me at our September post conference. Realizing that college librarians and instructors encountered some of the same attitudes as high school instructors and librarians was an eye opener. I was pleasantly surprised to see the lengths that academic librarians go to help with the research process. As a high school librarian, I know how much we have changed, but I forgot that as much as we have moved from the old stereotypes, so have they. As I continued researching what we in North Dakota are beginning to do, I find that not only are our concerns shared across the nation, but there are also similar and different approaches by these like groups of academic /high school librarians. Some are state or grant funded and some are college out- reach programs .

Most of the programs begin with assessing what incoming college students need to know. These groups create a list of skills college freshman need to execute research . These lists are created from reports from college faculty (including librarians) and college students based on necessary proficiencies for successful research. Examples range from “ I know where to get help” to researching

collections such as special libraries and archives and synthesizing these results for new insights. Some of the lists are also based on the skills students lack as reported by the faculty.

Another similarity I noticed in the studies is librarians' ability and proclivity to collaborate. We initiate and nurture opportunities with fellow teachers in school, with other librarians in our school systems and in our cities, areas and states. Now we are beginning to collaborate with librarians at different academic levels. We have been a part of this effort in North Dakota, just as there are ongoing efforts in Tennessee (Belmont University), as well as a state-wide effort in Arizona initiated by the Arizona State Library and Arizona State University. Bakersfield College and the Kern High School District in California has another well - developed initiative. A promising approach used in several of these efforts the inclusion of English teachers in the effort. As a high school librarian, much of my access to students comes through the English and Social Studies teachers, but to help teach the majority standards we expect to teach, we collaborate with our English teachers. Involving the English teachers in the effort obviously would require much effort, and it will be through the librarian's initiative in most cases. Librarians, for many reasons, lead many collaboration efforts and in this effort , it may be up to librarians to facilitate the process.

Even so, collaboration with English teachers would be invaluable in the success of this effort. In the ACT National Curriculum Study in 2009, an overwhelming percentage of high school teachers answered that their students were prepared for college work, while an almost equally overwhelming percentage of college instructors responded that these same students were not ready. There is a disconnect that can be solved if high school teachers and (high school librarians) can see evidence and proof that additional rigor and (what kind) is required . Another benefit would develop if our high school English instructors see exactly what academic and high school librarians are able to do to help them as well as what our standards are and what standards we share with them. At the same time,

however, when I meet with our English teachers whether singly, at their department meeting or other meetings throughout the district, I find that the number of initiatives in which they are involved as well as the increasing teaching expectations are overwhelming. Initiatives like these in which they can see for themselves how we can help them and how they should expect us to help them will benefit everyone. It can also show all parties exactly the expectations and goals we each have. We can save time for more teaching as we can cut down on duplication of services and make certain that we are reinforcing and not working against each discipline as we work to ascertain and meet college readiness requirements.

Many other states and districts are attempting to achieve the same goals as we have set. There were many ways schools and librarians chose to create classroom teacher involvement in the process. Arizona State partnered with the state library through a grant. Teachers were issued a stipend and the opportunity to earn credit. The sessions involved the deconstruction of a college assignment, and advice from both college faculty and college librarians about approaching those assignments as well as advice about the skill students needed to develop on the high school level to develop those assignments. Later in the session, state librarians taught both high school librarians and high school English faculty how to use the state databases. At Belmont University in Nashville, Tennessee, the library program began through Conversations@ Belmont as part of Academic Outreach of the College of Art and Science with the area schools. Much like the Arizona State program, Belmont librarians showed 60 participating high school librarians (and teachers who found out about the dinner and event) shared Belmont research assignment and some of the skill deficits incoming freshman exhibited. The dinner meeting was so successful that the library has its own Conversations @Belmont meetings scheduled for so many more meetings that it has turned into an ongoing and successful outreach program. Other programs at Kent State, Ohio, library have developed a well-known web site that area /nationwide students use to learn about college search techniques from a high school perspective. Another collaboration between college

and high school faculty at Bakersfield College and Kern High School District created library lessons that help teach the research process. Each skill was enumerated but also linked to a college website to demonstrate what the skill looked like on the college level.

(<http://www.bakersfieldcollege.edu/library/survival.asp>) Each of the colleges and school districts found ways to develop long-term collaborations to involve each other and the high school faculty that would answer its needs. These are just a few of the increasing partnerships between high school and academic librarians.

As busy as high school and academic librarians find themselves, the post conference was a welcome idea that was an important starting point. The ideas and collaborations we are beginning to develop are promising. The fact that we are opening our communication lines is also invaluable. I, as a high school librarian, may think I know exactly what college assignments entail. Without access through communication with my college librarian I do not know with certainty what current college expectations and necessary skills are. There is too much to learn in college today for us not to equip our eventual college students with the research knowledge and the skills they will need. With the communication that we are beginning to establish, that is information we can access through collaboration. It will benefit both high schools and colleges, and most of all, the students.