Auburn Libraries

LIBRARY INSTRUCTION:
A DISPATCH FROM THE FRONT*

Jim Gravitz
Coordinator of Library Instruction

RBD’s reference librarians have just barely beaten back an invasion of Auburn students and expect to complete mop-up operations by the middle of November. Well, it’s not exactly us versus them. It’s just that it sometimes seems like an invasion at the start of each quarter when librarians are called upon to offer library instruction classes to so many students. Because academic departments want to have their students learn the ways of the library early in the quarter, there occurs a two-week period during which the Bibliographic Instruction labs are booked to capacity. The load of English composition courses was so heavy that we had to send librarians to Haley Center to carry out instruction in the English department’s computer classroom.

As we look to the future, this last occurrence will probably take place more and more. That’s because we librarians are now trying a little harder to reach out to the academic departments and offer library instruction in their own areas, at their convenience. Another future development, to relieve space constraints, will be the construction of a new Bibliographic Instruction center on the first floor to be completed before the end of this millennium.

A few statistics indicate the breadth of library instruction during the fall quarter. At least 21 librarians led or backed up library instruction sessions during the first four weeks of the quarter. These librarians offered instruction to over two thousand students in English composition classes, the bulk of these in ENGL0110, an introductory composition class. They conducted eight Library Lifesaver sessions with 25 participants, and 21

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U100 classes, with over three hundred students. In addition, librarians taught 26 other formal classes in 18 academic departments besides English. These numbers include some, but not all, of the graduate tours conducted by subject specialists at the start of each quarter, and they do not include any teaching that took place at branch libraries. This catalog of numbers should make us realize we play a significant part in the university’s teaching mission.

Just as AU librarians have adjusted to organizational changes in-house, we will be called upon to make adjustments when the semester calendar takes effect in two years. Already we will face heavier requirements in the upcoming quarters with respect to the English composition program. The 1,700+ students who attended the ENGL0110 sessions this quarter will be enrolled in ENGL0112 later in the year, a composition course that requires THREE class sessions in the library. Hence the 75 classes of ENGL0110 will grow to 225 sessions to be covered later this school-year. So keep your helmets handy.

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WHAT IS LIBRARY INSTRUCTION?

Library instruction refers to single or multiple class sessions taught by subject specialist library faculty which introduce students to library research strategies and the basic information sources needed for effective use of the library.

Library instruction sessions are designed to complement particular courses or fields of study. Instruction covers use of local resources including AUBIEPlus, the Libraries' World Wide Web site, the AUBIECAT online system and other electronic resources, subject-specific print indexes and abstracting services, major bibliographies and reference tools, as well as appropriate remote sources accessible on the World Wide Web and from commercial information providers. Procedures for the retrieval and use of information and materials are also covered.

Why provide library instruction to your class?

Library instruction can help students with any or all of the following:

- Understanding the use of the libraries’ online system, as well as remote catalogs
- Identifying and critically evaluating information in various formats available from a variety of local and remote sources, including the World Wide Web
- Focusing and narrowing a topic
- Locating materials on a specific subject
- Recognizing scholarly vs. popular materials
- Finding statistics, documents, and other sources, both electronic and in print
- Overcoming library anxiety

Where is library instruction provided?

Classes are taught in the Bibliographic Instruction Classroom on the second floor of the RBD Library. The room can accommodate classes of up to 48 and is equipped with 24 microcomputer workstations and 24 printers, all networked locally and capable of Internet access, as well as a workstation with an LCD projector and CD-ROM player to demonstrate searching a variety of electronic sources. Special arrangements may be made for larger classes. Library instruction is also offered at the Library of Architecture, Design, and Construction and the Veterinary Medicine Library.

How do you plan for library instruction?

Library faculty are interested in becoming active partners in integrating information resources directly into classroom and individual learning by involvement with classroom faculty at the initial stages of planning for library instruction. They are available to consult on assignment design and implementation to assure that the objectives of any library assignment are realistic and appropriate, given available source materials and other library resources. Please call the appropriate library faculty member for advice as early as possible in planning a library assignment.

Library instruction should be scheduled as far in advance as possible to allow adequate preparation by the library faculty member involved. Timing is everything; students get the most out of library instruction if the session is presented on a date to coincide with the point of need for information. Once the session is scheduled, library faculty prepare their instruction and appropriate accompanying written materials in consultation with the instructor, taking into account the focus of the course, details of the students’ assignments, and what sources should be presented in the sessions.
SUGGESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE LIBRARY
RESEARCH ASSIGNMENTS

The following suggestions are offered in the spirit of enhancing the research process and product for students, faculty, and librarians alike. For effective library assignments:

Set objectives and make them clear to students: Example: Students should be able to locate and evaluate the information necessary to support an argument.

Teach research strategies where appropriate: Examples of a step-by-step strategy: (1) Define your topic using an encyclopedia article or textbook chapter for background information. (2) Develop a list of subject headings. (3) Use AUBIECat to find books on your topic. (4) Use an appropriate periodical index to find more recent information in magazines and journals.

Provide students with resource lists. Resource Lists give students something to work with by listing specific information sources (or types of sources) for a particular assignment. Auburn University Libraries have ready-made lists of reference sources in various subject areas that can be used for this purpose.

Consider alternative designs for research paper assignment. Examples: An annotated bibliography; an abstract of a journal article; a comparison of a popular magazine article and a scholarly journal article on the same topic; information seeking in a simulation of a real life project; an evaluation of a case study; students read and evaluate a case study of an information search and suggest alternatives to faulty procedures portrayed in the study.

Consult with librarians and use their services. Assignment design, appropriate research strategies, material availability, printer aids, subject seminars, and research desk services.

Avoid these common problems: The Mob Scene - An entire class looking for one piece of information or researching the same topic. The Shoot-In-The Dark Assignment - Students working from incomplete/incorrect information; materials assigned that the library does not own; vague topics assigned. The Scavenger Hunt - Students given obscure factual questions and told to find the answers. The Surprise Invasion - A class which appears in the library with no or little advance warning and expects a stellar presentation and tour of the facilities.
FROM THE DEAN

Dr. Stella Bentley, Dean
Auburn University Libraries

The Association of College and Research Libraries has long recognized the importance of bibliographic instruction (BI) for students in colleges and universities, and developed its first guidelines for BI more than twenty years ago.

With this issue, we highlight the BI activities available for your students in the Auburn University Libraries. We can provide specialized instruction for your classes whenever you would like. I encourage you to take advantage of this service for the students in your classes.