

Roles and Strengths of Teaching Librarians in Higher Education

Authored by the Standards and Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators
Revision Task Force

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1. Charge and History

In 2014, the Standards for Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators Revision Task Force was charged “to update and revise the Standards for Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators document in accordance with the recommendations published in the report of the Standards for Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinator Review Task Force.” The Review Task Force recommended that the new document adopt a contextual, holistic approach and wider vision which encompasses the roles and responsibilities of the instruction librarian within the academy, bridge the broader context and potential practical applications, and simplify the document. This new *Roles and Strengths of Teaching Librarians in Higher Education* document represents that revision. Major changes in the revision include language changes such as the shift from proficiencies to roles and from “instruction librarian” to “teaching librarian,” a structural change from a list to a circular model, and an altered focus in the document from skills to strengths needed to thrive in each of the roles. The term “teaching librarian” is used because the term is deemed broader and more participatory than “instruction,” indicative of the importance of teaching and the broader educational goals held by librarians.

2. Approach

The shift in focus in 2015 from the ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* to the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (Framework)* model prompted the Task Force to closely examine not only the proficiencies themselves but their structure and purpose. In the spirit of the *Framework*, the task force intended to present a more holistic perspective of the range of work done by teaching librarians rather than a list of skills needed to do a specific job. Teaching librarians have increasingly explored innovative and creative roles within their institutions, and the document is intended to reflect the myriad of activities, projects, and responsibilities that teaching librarians from a wide variety of institutions may find themselves taking on at different points in their work life and throughout their careers, as well as the characteristics and skills needed to flourish within these roles. The Task Force also wanted to provide a basic framework from which teaching librarian roles can continually expand within a variety of contexts. In short, this document was designed to act as a bridge between the conceptual and operational.

3. Context

The changing higher education environment, in which discrete skill sets rapidly evolve, necessitates a broad set of concepts to describe the dynamic roles undertaken by teaching librarians. In keeping with the *Framework*, which provides “a cluster of interconnected core concepts...rather than any prescriptive enumeration of skills” the new *Roles and Strengths*

50 document aims to construct broad and often overlapping categories within which teaching
51 librarians operate, and identifies strengths needed to carry out the daily work within those roles.

52 The following statement from the ACRL Board of Directors addresses the context of the
53 challenges ahead for teaching librarians:

54 At the 2016 ALA Midwinter Meeting in Boston, the ACRL Board of Directors took action to
55 formally adopt the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*. The Board also
56 affirmed its intent to make a decision on the status of the *Information Literacy Competency
57 Standards for Higher Education* at the 2016 ALA Annual Conference, according to the timeline
58 established at the 2015 ALA Midwinter Meeting.

59 The new *Framework* document remains a framework, not a standard, so that it can move forward
60 as a dynamic, living document with great flexibility and potential. The Information Literacy
61 Frameworks and Standards Committee is drafting a definition for frameworks, similar to those for
62 standards and guidelines, for Chapter 14 of ACRL's Guide to Policies and Procedures as part of
63 an overall review and revision outlined in their 2015-2016 Work Plan.

64 The roles of the teaching librarian in 2016 and beyond cannot be fully understood without
65 engagement with the concepts, knowledge practices, and dispositions outlined in the
66 *Framework*, which sets out "foundational ideas about the information ecosystem" in which
67 librarians work and students learn. The teaching librarian's meta-role for students is coach,
68 guide, and mentor as they navigate through this complex information ecosystem at different
69 stages of their personal and cognitive development. Throughout all the roles presented in the
70 new *Roles and Strengths* document, we see potential for improved student learning through
71 application of the rich ideas and context of the *Framework*.

72 The *Roles and Strengths* document will be launched while the changes brought about by the
73 *Framework* are still in development and the status of the *Information Literacy Competency
74 Standards for Higher Education* will be settled. Teaching librarians in the varied and diverse
75 higher education environments will still need to integrate these changes to work with their
76 library's programs and constituencies.

77 78 4. How the Document was Created

79 The members of the Task Force began by collecting U.S. job postings for academic instruction
80 or information literacy librarians from a six-month period. Postings were analyzed for emerging
81 trends as well as examined quantitatively through the Voyant text analysis program. The Task
82 Force also consulted recent literature related to job ads and academic standards, particularly
83 Gold & Grotti's 2013 article, "Do Job Advertisements Reflect ACRL's Standards for Proficiencies
84 for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators?: A Content Analysis." In a summary of their findings,
85 the authors suggested "...that professional standards can provide additional guidance regarding
86 specific competencies that go above and beyond the language of job ads." Identified trends
87 from the literature and analysis of job postings included:

- 88 • disciplinary and curricular integration knowledge promoting consistency with the larger
89 institution
- 90 • knowledge about online module creation and appropriate tools
- 91 • a range of teaching skills including a variety of formats and methods
- 92 • knowledge of outcomes, assessment, and scholarly communication
- 93 • collaboration with teaching faculty
- 94 • ability to work with other librarians as teaching and learning trainers in concert with an
95 increasing need for liaison librarians to teach
- 96 • and an understanding of signature disciplinary pedagogies.

97 Through discussions of these findings as well as the diverse experiences and institutional
98 contexts among the members of the Task Force, the seven roles which form the framework of
99 this document were developed: advocate, coordinator, instructional designer, lifelong learner,
100 leader, teacher, and teaching partner.
101

102 5. Purpose of the Roles

103 The purpose of the roles is to provide anchor points for which to conceptualize and describe the
104 broad nature and variety of the work that teaching librarians undertake as well as the related
105 characteristics which support librarians' thriving within those roles. These seven roles, which can
106 and do overlap, are intended to help librarians to situate our individual work experiences within
107 the broader work of academic libraries and within academic communities, as well as suggest
108 creative new areas for expansion. The roles also are intended to assist in naming and situating
109 some of the more abstract and unique situations in which librarians find themselves. In this
110 way, the document is purposefully broad and encompassing. Just as the IL Framework is not
111 intended to require librarians to touch upon every frame in every instructional situation, we did
112 not intend that every teaching librarian would or should be working in every role described in the
113 document. We anticipate that many librarians may find themselves identifying more strongly
114 with certain roles over others based upon their positions, institutional contexts, and other
115 factors.
116

117 6. Intended Use

118 This document is intended to help both clarify roles which may be assumed by a proficient
119 teaching librarian as well as inspire new roles.
120

- 121 • For hiring institutions, the roles can aid in thinking more specifically about what the
122 institution envisions for teaching librarians in accordance with their mission, vision, and
123 strategic objectives. While interviewing for new positions, the hiring committee is
124 frequently asked to describe teaching librarian responsibilities. These questions are
125 often answered as "teach information literacy sessions" or "coordinate instruction," but
126 these answers do not define duties as well as roles. These descriptions can be clarified
127 through identifying certain characteristics that are needed to thrive in specific roles.
128
- 129 • For individual librarians, units, or supervisors, the document can help with assisting
130 teaching librarians with goal setting for projects, ideas, or professional development, and
131 articulating how creative or unique work can reflect institutional priorities. The document
132 can help librarians to clarify the major role or roles associated with their specific position
133 in order to lend focus to their work and more clearly define their work to others. The roles
134 can also serve as a template for thinking about possibilities for new or unique positions
135 or as a means for re-envisioning and revitalizing educational responsibilities and roles.
136
- 137 • For future librarians, administrators, and instructors in LIS programs, the document
138 provides a nuanced portrait of the range of possibilities and expectations for practicing
139 teaching librarians.
140

141 Finally, this document is both based in actual experience and aspirational in nature. It is not
142 intended to be a comprehensive checklist of skills to be attained by every graduating LIS
143 student, or to be fulfilled by a job applicant. It is neither realistic nor intended for any teaching
144 librarian to fully embody all the roles or strengths in their current or desired position. Its intent is
145 to help academic teaching librarians to identify and clarify areas of focus for professional

146 development as well as identify new possibilities for collaboration, expansion, or creative
 147 projects.
 148

149 **ROLES**

150 **ADVOCATE**

151 Advocacy may involve persuasion, activism, encouragement, and support in many forms. A
 152 teaching librarian will need to be able to contextually situate information literacy and
 153 communicate its value across a range of audiences in the college/university community.
 154 Advocacy is required when working with library leaders and the college or university
 155 administration to promote and advance the *Framework for Information Literacy in Higher*
 156 *Education* and the structure of the instruction program in the overall library organization.

157 Strengths:

- 158 • Advocates for professional development opportunities and other forms of career
 159 advancement for teaching librarians.
- 160 • Communicates the value of information literacy to campus library colleagues.
- 161 • Advocates for the library's role in student learning and development across the
 162 curriculum.
- 163 • Partners with faculty to encourage information literacy within courses and within the
 164 curriculum.
- 165 • Engages with representatives of campus programs and initiatives to integrate
 166 information literacy into co-curricular activities.
- 167 • Promotes and advances information literacy standards to library leaders and campus
 168 administrators.
- 169 • Advocates for information literacy in relationship to student success in the context of
 170 institutional learning goals or learning outcomes.

171

172 **COORDINATOR**

173 A coordinator leads, develops, and maintains a library and/or institution's information literacy
 174 program. This role requires highly effective organizational and communication skills in managing
 175 multiple simultaneous projects, events, resources, assessment, statistical reporting and
 176 coordinating with administrators as well as academic departments. The coordinator must have
 177 diplomatic people skills and confidently navigate the politics of instruction - understanding the
 178 climate, culture and expectations of the stakeholders involved in the institution's information
 179 literacy objectives.

180 Strengths:

- 181 • Collaborates effectively and diplomatically, contributing to developing a welcoming
 182 culture of excellence in teaching, learning and student success.
- 183 • Encourages, leads and empowers other teaching librarians in their professional
 184 development and workload management.
- 185 • Uses social intelligence and political savvy with highly developed, inclusive
 186 communication skills to navigate complex and sensitive situations.
- 187 • Collaborates in the development of campus-wide information literacy initiatives and
 188 goals and facilitates change while generating trust, support, and commitment from
 189 administration and faculty partners.
- 190 • Creates and cultivates an environment of assessment and value for the information
 191 literacy program.
- 192 • Maintains a consistent and effective information literacy program by leading amidst
 193 changes in administration, resources, and funding.

- 194 • Assumes responsibility for assessment results, project management, and best practices
 195 for instruction programs.
 196

197 INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNER

198 The instructional designer creates educational experiences through designing instructional
 199 materials, and developing learning outcomes, assessment tools and learning objects. Diverse
 200 learning environments can include face-to-face, hybrid, and online classrooms. The instructional
 201 designer makes pedagogical choices appropriate to the educational environment, taking into
 202 consideration audience, culture, and accessibility dimensions.

203 The instructional designer draws upon a solid understanding of learning theory, pedagogical
 204 practices such as backward course design, outcomes alignment and assessment methodology,
 205 as well as technical skill in creating digital instructional materials. Communication and the ability
 206 to work collaboratively are also essential to this role. Instructional designers may work closely
 207 with both librarians and teaching faculty to design learning experiences that integrate
 208 information literacy and enhance instruction.

209 Strengths:

- 210 • Analyzes the instructional environment, and targets instruction delivery
 211 towards appropriate audiences.
- 212 • Identifies learning needs of students, and creatively addresses identified needs across
 213 multiple contexts drawing on a repertoire of tools, methods, and theories.
- 214 • Defines goals and outcomes for learning experiences.
- 215 • Creates innovative and appealing lessons with supporting instructional materials aligned
 216 with and supporting learning outcomes.
- 217 • Assesses the success and impact of learning experiences and makes appropriate
 218 adjustments to improve student engagement and learning.
- 219 • Stays current with trends and innovations in learning and instructional technologies.

220

221 LIFELONG LEARNER

222 The teaching librarian as lifelong learner is curious, open, and flexible, seeking out new
 223 opportunities for continuous learning. Throughout the professional career the librarian maintains
 224 enthusiasm for teaching through reflective practice and exploration of new approaches to
 225 instruction. Lifelong learners are self-motivated in their pursuit of new knowledge, ideas, and
 226 experiences.

227 Strengths:

- 228 • Pursues professional opportunities to improve and refresh teaching skills.
- 229 • Maintains currency in the literature on library instruction and information literacy.
- 230 • Actively participates in discussions on teaching and learning with colleagues online and
 231 in other forums.
- 232 • Demonstrates openness to implementing new ideas and new pedagogical practices and
 233 to exploring new instructional technologies.
- 234 • Participates in local, regional, or national professional associations.

235

236 LEADER

237 The teaching librarian demonstrates leadership in two broad areas - leading by example, and
 238 leading across campus contexts. The leader leads by example, working to create and maintain
 239 a healthy work environment by encouraging new ideas in teaching and learning and by
 240 supporting instructional endeavors of librarian colleagues. Librarian leaders model instructional
 241 best practices as well as continuous learning and growth, facilitate the sharing of pedagogical

242 ideas and experiences, and support teaching and learning efforts across disciplines and co-
 243 curricular areas.

244

245 The leader leads across contexts, including within the library, on campus, in professional
 246 contexts, and in the community. Teaching librarians lead alongside teaching faculty and
 247 academic staff, working with a diverse range of partners on campus. Librarians may co-lead
 248 cross-campus collaborations such as curriculum design, learning and technology initiatives,
 249 learning outcomes development at course and/or program levels, student success and retention
 250 efforts, campus committees and academic integrity programs. Using a unique, centralized
 251 perspective shaped by relationships with students, faculty, and staff, the leader is inclusive and
 252 diplomatic. Leading involves effectively navigating campus politics while successfully advancing
 253 and managing change. The leader joins other librarians and campus partners in furthering
 254 transformative vision and strategic action to advance information literacy as a library and
 255 campus-wide priority.

256 Strengths:

- 257 • Works to model effective change management.
- 258 • Builds and models a personal record of excellent instructional practice, including
 259 modeling new pedagogies.
- 260 • Establishes credibility with other librarians in the workplace.
- 261 • Creates an environment of positive learning, trust, and reflection, addressing
 262 pedagogical or instruction-related conflicts and encouraging the development of
 263 confidence in teaching.
- 264 • Advocates for financial and other resources for the instructional program to support
 265 human resources and professional development.
- 266 • Contributes valuable perspectives as a participant across campus communities.
- 267 • Navigates, communicates, and operationalizes information literacy within and among
 268 campus entities and structures.
- 269 • Builds organizational authority with regard to informational literacy regardless of place
 270 within the organizational hierarchy

271

272 TEACHER

273 This role emphasizes activity in the classroom or other instructional environments where the
 274 librarian interacts directly with learners. The teacher employs best practices of teaching and
 275 learning for integrating information literacy into higher education. The teacher engages with
 276 learners, partners with faculty and administrators, and motivates learning with regard to the
 277 importance of information literacy in disciplinary, subject-based, and applied contexts. The
 278 teacher employs a learner-centered approach, encouraging learners to be agents in their own
 279 learning.

280 Strengths:

- 281 • Analyzes the needs of each teaching/learning setting, environment, or group and
 282 employs appropriate pedagogical techniques to meet those needs.
- 283 • Articulates goals and learning outcomes for information literacy instruction.
- 284 • Selects from a repertoire of pedagogies and techniques for diverse learners and learning
 285 contexts and experiments with innovative instructional techniques and tools.
- 286 • Creates a positive and interactive learning environment which recognizes the importance
 287 of context.
- 288 • Engages in assessment to ensure that instruction is meeting the defined learning
 289 outcomes.
- 290 • Demonstrates enthusiasm for teaching and learning and a commitment to professional
 291 development, lifelong-learning, and reflective practice.
- 292 • Integrates concepts from the *Framework* in design and content of instructional situations.

293

294 TEACHING PARTNER

295 Teaching librarians have many opportunities to collaborate in different instructional settings with
 296 teaching faculty, other librarians, and other campus colleagues. These relationships aspire to be
 297 partnerships rather than support services. Being a teaching partner requires the teaching
 298 librarian to have confidence in the strengths they bring to collaborative relationships with
 299 colleagues, including broader perspectives about information literacy, formal education in how
 300 information is organized and classified, and expertise in research skills. The librarian must also
 301 respect the strengths brought by the partner. In the best teaching partnerships, each person's
 302 contributions are valued equally.

303 The teaching librarian is able to articulate how their contributions are relevant to the instructional
 304 context. They may also be involved in designing assignments, assessing students' information
 305 literacy skills, or providing feedback on student assignments or projects. Conversations between
 306 the librarian and the teaching partner can establish the level of the librarian's involvement and
 307 explore creative possibilities for collaboration.

308 Strengths:

- 309 • Seeks out and engages teaching partners, remaining open to various ways of
- 310 collaborating.
- 311 • Builds mutual respect, trust, and understanding with teaching partners.
- 312 • Models and encourages effective collaboration with teaching partners.
- 313 • Articulates benefits of collaborating with the teaching librarian.
- 314 • Develops with teaching partners shared vision and goals for the collaboration.
- 315 • Negotiates librarian's responsibilities and expectations for the instructional setting with
- 316 teaching partners.
- 317 • Brings information literacy perspective and expertise to the partnership.

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