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Sabbatical Report: March 1, 2016-August 31, 2016

As a Public Services librarian whose main focus is in library instruction, my objective during sabbatical was to find new methods to enhance my work with students who attend library instruction sessions. I wanted to gain a better understanding of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, which was adopted in 2015 (http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework). I also wanted to explore ideas to identify ways to teach skills at different levels to engage students who may have already participated in information literacy.

I reviewed literature on the ACRL framework, which was created to update the standards set forth in 2000 (http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency). The framework, based on threshold concepts, identified six main concepts to base goals and learning outcomes. The framework also identified skill levels for novice and expert researchers and included descriptions for each threshold. I had wanted to see if those ideas could be implemented in our library instruction program. I found that many of the examples used by other librarians were for 100- and 200-level classes, but not necessarily for upper division classes. I came to the conclusion that in those levels, emphasis should be placed on advanced research techniques. While some of the literature was theoretical, I was also able to read literature that had practical ideas and lesson plans that could be adapted for our library if approached by instructors to focus on those skills.

I was able to attend Library Instruction West, a conference on information literacy. The workshops included practical ways to improve outreach and services to students, including ways to help students become comfortable using the library. They helped me to examine the way I approach instruction and how my students may view these sessions. Some workshops offered examples of exercises that could be used to teach different concepts, including reading comprehension and critical thinking. The conference also afforded me many networking opportunities to discuss library instruction programs at other universities. Many universities offer credit-bearing courses in information literacy and it was interesting to hear the pros and cons of such programs and how to structure such classes.

Many of the workshops discussed the threshold concept and how to apply it in library instruction. One workshop that was especially helpful had participants apply the framework to student comments collected through interviews at the presenter’s university. The comments were collected from students of all levels. We were able to examine comments made about students’ experiences with learning and see whether they were able to “cross the threshold” of
understanding. Examining those comments supported what I have learned as a committee member of our own Campus Assessment Support committee. Many times students are unsure of their ability to work at the level expected at universities at the beginning of their freshman year, but gain more confidence. This confidence lessens as they begin upper division classes and the level of understanding students are expected to have increases.

During this time I was also able to visit with other UH system librarians to discuss information literacy issues. I met with librarians at Manoa to answer questions they had about UH Hilo’s online library instruction program, which they had been considering adapting for their library. They also shared ideas about incorporating the framework that they had found through their own research.

I was able to devote time to further examine library surveys and other methods of assessment. Of particular interest was the University 101 library survey that was administered to all classes that came in for library instruction in Fall 2015. The students in these 20 sections provided feedback for what was helpful about the library visit, what they would have liked to learn more about, and what was not as useful. The results of the survey have helped me to determine which services to highlight in tours of the library. The survey also validated the belief that students believe that repeated library instruction includes the same information and that there is a need to differentiate between class visits.

Based on what I have learned, I have made changes in my approach to library instruction. During tours, I point out the services that students commented were useful to learn about from the surveys. I focus on advanced search techniques when working with upper-division classes. When working with students who have had library instruction in the past, I also take the time to introduce them to resources they did not learn about in their previous library instruction sessions.