Speed Training: Library Instruction in 30 Minutes or Less
Kari A. Kozak & Darlene Kaskie, University of Iowa

Abstract

A question plaguing many librarians today is how to convey information and services when everyone is so busy. One answer may be to offer express classes. The Library offered a series of 15-30 minute drop-in classes as part of a series called Library Xpress Classes over the course of three semesters beginning in the Spring of 2013 and following though the Spring of 2014. For the first two semesters, the series targeted one topic each week and repeated the same class twice each Thursday to reach a broader range of people. During the last semester, the topic was taught once per week on Wednesdays. In total, fifty-three classes were offered over the three semesters.

The sessions were open to faculty, staff, graduate, and undergraduate students. Topics include basics on popular databases (Compendex, SciFinder, PubMed, etc.), citation management software (Endnote and Refworks), alerts and notifications, and popular types of resources (patents and standards). The classes are not designed to be comprehensive but to give an overview and brief introduction to products and services that otherwise might not be seen.

The sessions were taught by various campus librarians with different areas of expertise who visited the Engineering Library. Some classes were more successful than others. For example, the citation management software sessions were the most popular. The attendees were asked to rate the classes on a 5 point scale (with 5 being most useful). The average rating was 4.42 from the spring of 2013, 4.25 from the fall of 2014, and 4.37 from the spring of 2014. The average overall rating for the combined three semesters was 4.34.

More students attended the 2:30 pm afternoon sessions than either the 10 am or the 5 pm classes and most of the attendees were graduate students. The classes often had repeat students. In one class called Refworks, a graduate student noted he had never heard of Compendex until it was mentioned in this class. He, then, went on to sign up for 4 more of the sessions offered that semester.

The Xpress Class series has proven to be an overall success. As time goes on the Library will continue to adjust the programs to improve its outreach to students, faculty, and staff.

Introduction

With so much interdisciplinary education and research being conducted within engineering, the faculty, staff, and students often need to work with a variety of resources and services that usually are not seen in the engineering library or have not been used in sometime. These library users often have time-restraints that do not allow them to attend traditional hour-long training sessions. The Lichtenberger Engineering Library decided to help with this problem by providing a series of drop-in sessions which were fifteen or thirty minutes in length. This series of classes was named Library Xpress Classes. They were open to all faculty, staff, and students on the
campus and were focused towards those doing research and study through the College of Engineering.

The course series has been offered for three semesters beginning in the spring of 2013 and going through the spring of 2014 as of today’s date. For the first two semesters, the series targeted one topic each week and repeated the same class twice each Thursday to reach a broader range of people. During the last semester, the topic was taught once per week on Wednesdays. In total, fifty-three classes were offered over the three semesters.

In addition to classes being taught by the engineering library staff offering updates for primary resources in the engineering fields, sessions were also taught by library staff from other campus libraries to offer those working in interdisciplinary fields an opportunity to learn about resources that might not be familiar. Topics covered include basics on popular databases (Compendex, SciFinder, PubMed, etc.), citation management software (Endnote and RefWorks), alerts and notifications, and popular types of resources (patents and standards). The classes were not designed to be comprehensive but just to give an overview and brief introduction to products and services that otherwise might not be seen.

**Literature Review**

Academic librarians, recognizing the importance yet the limitations for connecting with students due to time-restraints as well as their continued reliance upon mobile technology, offer abbreviated library instruction as an alternative, or a supplement, to more formal, comprehensive teaching methods. The “traditional model” of instruction might be a one-hour lecture. However, the short instruction, variously named, is derived for the purpose of briefly interfacing with students for the opportunity of active and integrated education and research assistance.

Giannini wrote a report on the “‘drop-in’ sessions” which were utilized at Monash University in Australia as an alternative to the more traditional and formal library instructive methodology. The “drop-in” classes were brief, hands-on, and targeted to introducing the basic resources of a specific subject. Jacklin & Bordonaro, at Brock University in Canada, implements the “drop-in clinics” to supplement the formal classroom instruction. A professor introduces the librarian in a faculty classroom. Then, the librarian provides an overview of the clinics scheduled throughout the term to coincide with class assignments. During the non-mandatory drop-in clinics, students are “engaged in social learning” as the librarian functions as a “facilitator” for the student’s research.

Texas A&M librarians have developed the “‘drive-by’, a scheduled in-class public service announcement (PSA)-like session to give the students a sneak peak at resources and show them a friendly face from the library. Similar to Jacklin & Bordonaro, the librarians form working relationships with faculty. By requesting minimal time and assistance from professors, often just asking for the class syllabi so that they can tailor the “drive-by” to specific and relevant resources associated with the course, the librarians’ initiatives and flexibility contribute to the success of the program.
Library instruction literature identified timing and marketing as two key factors influencing successful programming. Manuel gathered and analyzed a decade worth of data from the drop-in workshops offered at New Mexico State University (NMSU). Previously, workshops had been falling out of favor as an instructional methodology due to poor attendance. Finding the optimal day and time during the semester, which did not conflict with class schedules, improved attendance. Effective promotion also achieved better attendance results. “Overall, the key to publicity is getting word out, reaching people where they are, rather than expecting them to come in to the library to pick up copies of flyers from service desks.” Creating “mailing lists” from the names of previous attendees, reporting the outcome of previous workshops to alert potential attendees of future workshops, and offering incentives such as extra course credit were all used at NMSU to boost attendance.

Assessing the outcomes and benefits of the classes were also discussed in the literature. Following any kind of instruction, surveying students, faculty, and staff help with evidentiary reporting and can guide future programming. Hollister & Coe surveyed librarians in order to report trends in instructional service. According to the survey results, traditional methods for instruction are relevant but no single instruction method is most effective. “The use of a variety of instructional methods, reaching ever-widening audiences, and addressing ever-changing needs, is preferred.”

**Design Method**

In order to reach a wide audience, planning required that several key elements be taken into consideration: classes offered, time of day, and instructors’ availability. All of these elements had to come together for these sessions to work. The design of the sessions varied each of the three semesters in an effort to improve attendance.

For the spring of 2013 semester, a discussion of which classes to offer began with a survey that was completed the prior year. College of Engineering students, faculty, and staff were asked to identify topics of interest. Also, since one of the departments in the College of Engineering was Biomedical Engineering, research was being conducted on genomes and proteins so it was thought they this subject might be of interest. The staff also considered topics that were the most requested by instructors when providing library instruction in the classroom which resulted in adding standard searching and PubMed to the list. After this evaluation, the library staff arrived at a course offering for the first semester. This sessions were Library Overview, RefWorks, Standards, Web of Science, Finding Company Information, PubMed, SciFinder, Compendex, Genome Databases, and Patents.

Once topics were selected, the next objective was scheduling. What were the optimal times for these classes? Reviewing the College of Engineering event calendar, for example, revealed an upcoming career fair which led to timing a session for how to search company information before the fair. Also, the library gate count was researched. The statistics identified Tuesdays and Thursdays as high traffic days which would make for greater attendance. In conjunction with the College of Engineering event calendar, Thursday was selected. To give more flexibility for the students, faculty, and staff attending the sessions, it also was decided to offer each class twice: once in the morning (10:00 am) and once in the afternoon (2:30 pm). For the fall of 2013
semester, the classes were offered at 2:30 pm and 5:00 pm. In the spring of 2014, the classes were moved to Wednesdays at 2:30 pm since many departments had seminars on Thursday afternoons. Teaching two classes per week had proven challenging, too, so the library staff decided to offer only one class time.

The third objective was recruiting various librarians throughout the Library system to teach these diverse express classes. The librarians asked to teach these classes were from various campus libraries. Several of the librarians thought that 15 minutes was not enough time to cover the topic. In that case, the librarian was extended the opportunity to teach the class as a 30-minute session; however, it was decided that no class should be more than 30 minutes as this would defeat the purpose of express classes and fall back into the “traditional” instruction model. With this option, the library staff was able to find instructors for each of the sessions. (See Figures 1, 2 & 3)

Marketing Strategy

The marketing strategy for the Xpress Class series focused on getting the word out any which way possible throughout the whole semester. The library staff wanted to be very inclusive opening the sessions to faculty, staff, graduate and undergraduate students throughout the whole university with an emphasis on the College of Engineering.

Marketing methods included:

- Flyers
- Plasma Slides: Plasma Televisions are located throughout the College of Engineering and two are in the Engineering Library
- Digital Picture Frame Slides: Digital Picture screens are stationed at the circulation desk of the library
• Calendar: Both the College of Engineering Events Calendar & the Library Event Calendar
• College of Engineering Weekly Newsletter
• Weekly Emails to faculty, staff, and students
• Pre-Registration

Flyers and slides were created with a uniform look and coloring for continuity and branding. Separate slides were produced for each class session which were displayed the week before the class. Another slide ran through the semester listing the whole schedule. (See Figure 4)

Emails were sent the day before a session. During the second semester, a concern was made about filling everyone’s inbox so the emails about the class series were only sent three times over the semester. Patrons had the ability to register and to receive a reminder email the day before. Due to so few people using the pre-registration option, it was not implemented the third semester, and the staff reverted to the weekly emails.

Assessment

After each session, the participants received a short survey. The library staff evaluated the responses for basic assessment purposes. (See Figure 5 for sample questionnaire.) The survey solicited several things:

• University status (freshman, graduate student, faculty, etc.)
• College department association (Biomedical, Civil, etc.)
• Class rating on a 1-5 scale
• Open comments (e.g., what did the participant find most useful)
Results

Using Microsoft Office Excel software to tabulate the survey results, the Library staff was able to obtain feedback and analyze results from the various classes. Tables 1 & 2 reflect attendance results for all classes taught during the three separate semesters.
Table 1 - Survey Summary Results for spring 2013 through spring 2014

Table 1 indicates that 68% of the participants attended the 2:30 pm classes versus the morning classes for the spring of 2013 semester and that 95% of the participants attended the 2:30 pm class versus the 5 pm class in the fall of 2013.

Several factors probably played into the decrease enrollment for the fall semester. The first big change for the second semester was the lack of weekly reminder emails sent to the College of Engineering faculty, staff, and students. Reminders only were sent a total of three times throughout the entire semester instead of each week. The first reminder was sent the first week, right before the Standards session. The second reminder was sent before the Compendex session. Reviewing the attendance records, these were the classes with the highest participation.

The library offered patrons the option to register for the classes which would send a reminder email the day before the class; however, only 5 people took advantage of this service throughout
the semester and only 2 of the patrons who had reminders sent to them actually attended the sessions. For the spring of 2014 semester, the staff went back to weekly emails and saw an increase in enrollment.

Another factor was that Thursday afternoons were a busy time for those in the College of Engineering. Most departments had weekly seminars in the late afternoon on Thursday during the fall semester, which unfortunately did not get added to the College of Engineering events calendar until the second week of classes. By then, the Library Xpress Classes were already organized. There were times the College of Engineering calendar would have more than six different activities taking place in the college on Thursday afternoons.

Department totals in Table 1 indicate that Chemical and Biochemical Engineering or Mechanical and Industrial Engineering Departments were tied for second and third most represented groups at the sessions. Those who listed their department as other were often from one of the five research centers that are associated with the College of Engineering. This group attended the most sessions.

The classes with highest overall attendance for the combined three semesters were RefWorks followed by Compendex, patents, and standards. See Figure 6 - Xpress Class Series Spring of 2013 - Spring of 2014 Attendance by Subject. The classes with one asterisk (*) signifies the class was taught one of the three semesters while the two asterisks (**) signifies it was taught two of the three semesters. The classes without asterisks were taught all three semesters. Because the library is converting from RefWorks to Endnote by December 2014, and to ease into the transition, all RefWorks classes were switched to EndNote in the spring 2014.

Figure 6 – Xpress Class Series Spring of 2013 - Spring of 2014 Attendance by Subject
The Xpress Classes were attended by faculty, staff, and students from freshman to graduate students. Graduate students accounted for 48% of those in attendance of sessions. Of those attending the sessions most had a favorable option. The freshman found the classes to be the least useful at 3.75 average on a 5 point scale. All the other groups had an average rating of 4 or higher for the usefulness of the classes. See Table 2 - Xpress Class Series Spring of 2013 - Spring of 2014 Rating Average by Status.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Attendance Number</th>
<th>Rating Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grad Students</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2 – Xpress Class Series Spring of 2013 - Spring of 2014 Attendance/Rating by Status*
Figure 7 – Xpress Class Series Spring of 2013 - Spring of 2014 Attendance by Status

Figure 8 – Xpress Class Series Spring of 2013 - Spring of 2014 Attendance by Department
Even with low attendance during the fall semester of 2013, the surveys showed favorable opinions of the classes offered, and several of the students attended more than one of the sessions in the series. The comment statements were usually “very helpful” or “very useful.” Using all the answers given on the survey for “which topics presented today were most useful?”, the engineering library staff created a Wordle (see Figure 9) to highlight which topics the participants found more useful. RefWorks was by far the most popular with Compendex, standards, patents, and Endnote also having high attendance.

![Figure 9 – Wordle of survey results for “which topics were most useful.”](image)

**Conclusion**

The Xpress Class series has been an overall success for the Lichtenberger College of Engineering Library. It was an excellent opportunity for collaboration of library staff campus-wide to teach faculty, staff, and student about various resources and services the library users may not know about.

To improve the series, the library staff will send weekly email reminders the day before each class and will no longer use the library events calendar registration forms. The series also will change to Wednesdays with the anticipation that fewer events will conflict with College of Engineering events but keep the time at 2:30 pm. There is enough interest to continue the series and to tweak the type and times of sessions to provide the best possible service to the College of Engineering faculty, staff, and students. The three semesters have given the library staff a great deal of information for what did and did not work. This information will be used to improve the classes for future participants.

**Bibliography**

