Where do librarians in higher education learn how to teach? Are courses on instruction part of LIS program curriculum? How can we better train and support academic librarians who teach?

In the Literature

Training and Education:

- Calls for better training in instruction have been present since the 1970s: Galloway (1976), surveying 47 LIS program curricula, determined that “instruction receives only superficial attention; a cursory mention in the curricula of less than half the schools” (p. 29).
- The number of courses increased throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Larson & Meltzer, 1987; Sullivan, 1996).
- Even with this increase, Westbrook (1989) argued that “the need still outpaces the support” (p. 96). This conviction is repeated in more recent literature (e.g. Sproles, Johnson, & Farison, 2008; Westbrook & Fabian, 2010; Bewick & Corrall, 2010; Bryan, 2016).
- Several studies suggest that librarians would prefer to learn about instruction in their LIS programs (Shonrock & Mulder, 1993; Bewick & Corrall, 2010).
- Walter (2008) suggests a closer look at the content and structure of courses on instruction, as well as how they are perceived by students (p. 56, 62).
- Several studies suggest “formalizing” on-the-job or job-embedded learning (Westbrook & Fabian, 2010, p. 588; Hess, 2016).

The Study

- 20 LIS programs with online curriculum information and course descriptions were surveyed for courses on instruction.
- An online questionnaire (9 questions) was sent out via email and Twitter to a small network of librarians in higher education.
- The survey received 32 responses.
- Brief follow-up interviews were conducted on a volunteer basis with 5 of the 32 responding librarians.

Findings: The Current Situation

Courses on Instruction:

- 19 of the 20 surveyed LIS programs have dedicated instruction courses.
- 11 programs have 1 course; 6 have 2; 2 have 3.
- 7 have university certificates in college teaching/pedagogy.

Learning about Teaching:

- Most respondents did not take an instruction course in their LIS program (See Fig. 1).
- Several “Yes” responses were qualified by comments such as: “But it was horrible” or “It barely scratched the surface.”
- Most acquired knowledge of teaching through other means (See Fig. 2).
- 19 out of 32 had received some kind of mentoring related to teaching.

Findings: Opportunities for Change

Teaching is Expected:

- Most survey respondents expected to teach (See Fig. 3).
- This supports claims from respondents and the literature that more training is necessary.

Interviewees mentioned:

- Mentality shift within profession is needed: a more intentional focus on instruction in LIS education and professional practice
- Require LIS students to take a course on instruction

“Teaching is about practice and learning from doing.”
-Survey Participant

Suggestions for better training and support:

- Create courses on online instruction
- Engage with instruction literature outside of librarianship
- Create opportunities for practice (for students and interested professionals)
- Residency or Fellowship programs for recent graduates
- Teaching orientation for new hires
- Mechanisms for observation
- ACRL Immersion
- Internal support mechanisms (e.g. reading or conversation groups)

Continuing Education on Instruction:

- Librarians use many of the same methods in Fig. 2 for continuing education on instruction.
- Conferences were more often mentioned in the context of continuing education and keeping current with instruction practices.
- Respondents also mentioned theCritlib community on Twitter as a continuing source on instruction.
- In general, respondents were most interested in literature on specific, practical approaches that they could apply directly to their work.

Conclusions:

- Academic librarians learn about instruction from many sources, and most respondents utilized several avenues for exploration. Time is a significant factor in continued learning.
- Most preferred learning by doing, observing, and conversing with colleagues.
- There is a strong preference for literature on specific, practical approaches to instruction that can be applied to daily practice.
- There are many opportunities for more systematic training and support.

For references and more details on the study, scan the QR code above.

“Both [beginning librarians and academic institutions] should commit themselves to making additional training and continuing education a priority” (Sproles et al., 2008, p. 207).