Session 9

Classroom Odyssey: Teaching Adventures in the Art Library & Cyberspace

Tuesday April 3, 2001; 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Moderators:

B. J. Kish Irvine, Fine Arts Librarian, Indiana University
Tom Greives, Reference Librarian/Fine Arts Bibliographer, Arizona State University

Recorder: Heather Ball

Sponsors: Academic Library Division; Reference and Information Services Section (RISS)

Speakers:

Maya Gervits, Art Librarian, Rutgers University, "Subject-Integrated Instruction in the Art Library"

Christina Gjertsen, Reference Librarian, Adam and Sophie Gimbel Design Library, Parsons School of Design, "Teaching in the Art School Library"

Miguel Juarez, Fine Arts and Photography Librarian, University of Arizona Library, "Developing an Online Teaching Portfolio to Assess Bibliographic Instruction"

Lauren Lessing, Reference Librarian, Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, Art Institute of Chicago, "From Member to Curator: Tailoring Instruction for the Spectrum of Museum Library Patrons"

Related Event:

Poster session by Monica Fusich, "The Art of Instructing," Tuesday, 10:00-10:30am

Tom Grieves introduced the session:

Classroom and online instruction by art librarians in academic, museum, and art school libraries have undergone dramatic changes in the last decade. Traveling between the worlds of print media and cyberspace demands capacity and enthusiasm for change, innovation, and technological savvy coupled with respect and knowledge of traditional art historical resources.

How does one keep pace with rapid and constant changes in the field?

What kinds of institutional support can one expect for the constant need for update of hardware and software?

How does one evaluate and update bibliographic and instruction methodology that respects reliable, tried and true print resources, while intro new electronic approaches to gathering art information?

What are the expectations/attitudes of their patrons, their supervisors and their institutions.

Representing art school, museum, and university art libraries, the speakers will explore and discuss the varied approaches to instruction which mandate the need to bridge our historical roots with the vastness of cyberspace.

B.J. Irvine introduced the speakers individually prior to each of their presentations.

Maya Gervits spoke about her experiences as Art Librarian at Rutgers, specifically with what she calls “subject-integrated instruction”. In a rapidly changing environment, instruction can be approached in different ways, depending on the subject being taught, the materials available for research and teaching, and the academic level of the students. She listed the ingredients that should be included in all instruction sessions. Library instruction sessions should include exercises that strengthen critical thinking skills, they should be cost effective and students should receive some individual attention. Maya also recommended trying not to overwhelm the students by giving them too much information at once.

The course-integrated approach takes instruction a step further, in that it is tailored to meet the needs of a particular subject area. This method gives students a better understanding of the subject being taught, presenting them with the opportunity to focus on resources that are specific to a
given subject. Usually, it is necessary that a course-integrated instruction session include interdisciplinary resources (such as Web of Science) in addition to the usual art and architecture resources.

In order to prepare for a course-integrated session, Maya suggested sitting down and writing out an outline of possible directions to take in researching the course topic. Identify and organize a wide range of resources and select the most reliable and scholarly resources from this list. Ultimately, the goal is to design a course that empowers students to successfully undertake the research process on their own. She presented examples of resources that she covers in the sessions she teaches for the multidisciplinary course, *Art and Archaeology of the African Diaspora*.

Approaches to distance learning were also discussed. A session taught to remote classrooms of students may be presented via the web, video or through live discussion online.

Maya often utilizes PowerPoint as a teaching tool in her instruction sessions. She noted that it allows her to focus on key points and keep the information she is presenting better organized. PowerPoint does not require expensive technology and offers the flexibility of including internet links, video and images in an instruction session. A PowerPoint session may also be published on the internet, or emailed to a student.

The cooperation of faculty has also been a crucial aspect in designing a successful course-integrated session. Faculty have reported back that they have noticed a difference in the quality of papers submitted by students who have benefited from library instruction tailored to their subject. Maya has found that their experiences with this approach to instruction has increased their confidence in using the library, and that they now have more feelings of ownership regarding the library and its resources.

Christina Gjertsen, Reference Librarian at the Adam and Sophie Gimbel Design Library of the Parsons School of Design spoke about library instruction in an art school setting. Parsons is part of a larger university (The New School), and the Design Library is one of three campus libraries. They all share an OPAC in partnership with NYU. Because of this consortia arrangement, Christina explained how items cited in the online catalog can be located in one of many libraries around New York City. When talking with students she reminds them that they should start their research at Parsons, making it less overwhelming for them.

Each year, she and another reference librarian conduct an average of twenty library tours, four “mass orientations”, two faculty seminars, and about sixty library orientations. The mass orientations are for students just starting out at Parsons. They are taught in an auditorium using PowerPoint during orientation week. Library tours are available for those patrons who may not get the traditional introduction to the library through required coursework: usually faculty, continuing ed and graduate students, transfer students and adjunct faculty.

Faculty seminars were just started this past year at Parsons and are team-taught in the New School Library’s computer lab. The seminars are largely promoted by the department heads, and more than half of those attending are usually faculty from Parsons. The focus of the seminars are on electronic resources and how to search the online catalog efficiently.

Library instruction classes tailored for specific classes are also offered. Christina explained that they focus on getting the students into the library and making them feel comfortable there, making sure that the students actually see where everything is in the library. Because there is no room set aside for instruction, they spend a lot of time touring the library. Handouts that includes a map of the library and a brief overview of the LC classification system are passed around. One unique aspect of the Parsons experience is that about 40% of the students are from Asia and are new to the LC system.

Christina also described what she calls “The Research Triangle”. This “triangle” is comprised of 1) books, 2) reference works, and 3) periodicals and how to use these resources in art research. She also discusses the internet with them and how to evaluate information on the net. She ended her talk with pictures of her sessions at Parsons.

Lauren Lessing drew upon her experiences at the Art Institute of Chicago as Reference Librarian to discuss the unique role of instruction within museum libraries. She pointed out that most museum libraries serve two distinct groups of patrons: an internal community of curators and research staff, and an external one comprised of the general public. At the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries at the Art Institute of Chicago, a third community is served: the students and faculty of the Art Institute. In order to meet the needs of these three main groups, the Reader Services Department at the Libraries is developing a three-part bibliographic instruction program.

The question, why museum libraries should consider library instruction was raised. At the Art Institute, art is seen as inseparable from education, and the joining of the two is explicit in the institution's mission. Teaching patrons how to do their own art research allows them to develop their own interpretations about the objects in museum collections, or even in their own living room. Research staff and curators, while focused on recent developments in art history, are usually not up constant changes in the world of information science. It is the responsibility of librarians to not only introduce new research tools to them, but to also provide instruction. In theory, by providing instruction to research staff and empowering them to do their own research, both the time of the patron and that of the librarian is saved.

Point of need instruction cuts across all three categories of users, but is not always practical as it is usually very time consuming. Additionally, not everyone is comfortable asking for help. For these reasons, more formal instructional programs tailored for particular groups with similar research
requirements, are being developed. The first example Lauren gave involved working with a Modern Art Survey class from the School in which over 600 students were enrolled. The students had two weeks to research a 19th or 20th Century work of art in the museum collection. They were to compile a list of published sources that discussed either a particular work in the collection, or ones similar to it by the same artist. As a requirement of the assignment, each student was to visit both the Flaxman and the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries.

Prior to the beginning of the course, the librarians took an active role in creating the assignment with the professor and assistant instructors. A handout explaining the research tools available in the library supplemented a short presentation given to the class. Extra copies of the handout were provided at the reference desk as well.

Lauren reported that, overall, the project was a success. All of the students in the class (the entire incoming freshman class) visited both libraries and became acquainted with basic research tools (such as the on-line catalogs and indexes), and with the strengths of each library’s collection. This was particularly important for the museum’s library as it is physically removed from the School. The most difficult aspect of the project was dealing with the surge of students that came into the library the last four days prior to the deadline for the assignment (about half the class). After the assignment, the librarians met to discuss what could be improved next time and shared their insights with the professor.

The introduction of a new, web-based online catalog allowed the library to provide workshops to the museum's curators and research staff. Under the pretext of introducing the new catalog, groups of ten or fewer were led through hour-long, hands-on instruction sessions that included the basic principals of database searching (such as Boolean logic).

Lauren also described a series of workshops created for museum members who were interested in researching artwork that they personally owned (the most popular research topic for this group). The evening workshops were advertised in the Institute’s newsletter and were limited to 15 participants. Each lasted an hour and a half. General principals as to what constitutes value in a work of art were discussed, as well as how value is assigned to a work of art by appraisers. A variety of resources were covered, including catalogs, indexes, biographical dictionaries, and auction catalogs. A tour of the library, along with a hands-on session with the online catalog was provided. A new series of workshops researching Chicago area homes is now in the works, and may be done in collaboration with Chicago Public Library.

Lauren concluded that bibliographic instruction does not actually save the time of the librarian, particularly in the museum setting, as no single program of instruction can meet the needs of all their patrons. Regardless of the obstacles, she also recognizes the responsibility of museums as educational institutions to provide this service for their patrons.

Miguel Juarez, Fine Arts Librarian of the University of Arizona began his talk by asking how many people in the audience had heard of a teaching portfolio, and how many actually had one. (Less than ten people raised their hands.) Miguel listed a few reasons for creating a teaching portfolio, most importantly because it “makes your life easier”. A teaching portfolio can be a tool for self-evaluation and reflection. It can provide evidence of teaching effectiveness and be used in applying for tenure, new jobs or promotions. Keeping a teaching portfolio can also allow a teacher to examine job performance over a period of time. In archiving the different stages of a teaching portfolio, research into changes in the teaching role of librarianship can be measured more definitively.

Miguel cited four websites that discuss teaching portfolios:

Teaching Portfolios:  Web Links

http://fis.ell.wayne.edu/fls/teachptf.htm

Teaching Portfolios:  UT El Paso site

http://www.utep.edu/cetal/portfoli/

Teaching Portfolios: University of Buffalo site

http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/projects/trl/development.html

University of Tennessee site

http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/projects/trl/development.html

He also referred to Peter Seldin’s book, *The Teaching Portfolio : a practical guide to improved performance and promotion/tenure decisions.*

A librarian’s teaching portfolio may include a wide variety of material, including: lists and descriptions of courses taught, examples of handouts and instruction materials, a statement of teaching philosophy, examples of student and faculty evaluations, projects that students completed as a result of library instruction, and any teaching awards presented. It may also include letters or comments about teaching performed, passed along to
the librarian from colleagues, students, faculty or department heads. Any participation in teaching seminars, conferences or workshops may also be included.

Miguel also made recommendations for developing an online teaching portfolio and offered his own portfolio as an example: (http://www.library.arizona.edu/users/juarezm/TeachingPortfolio.html). An online portfolio will contain most of the same information listed for the paper version (such as a philosophy statement and lists of courses taught). It can also include digitized and PDF versions of letters, instruction materials and evaluation tools, as well as streaming video or audio examples of instruction sessions. An online teaching portfolio may also include statements on information literacy, visual literacy and teaching strategies.

In closing, Miguel reminded the audience that “there are no endings, only beginnings” and that the teaching portfolio is always a work in progress.

Q & A

One member of the audience asked Christina what issues she has had to overcome in the faculty seminars that she teaches and whether or not she has return visitors. Christina replied that the group is usually pretty small, so she is able to work with them individually. She takes steps to make the faculty feel more comfortable by asking them to introduce themselves to each other and includes a cookie and coffee break in the seminar. She does have some return again, and they also come into the library after the seminar to visit.

An audience member from Columbia College in Chicago suggested that the librarians at Columbia College would be interested what Lauren’s students were doing, as they could benefit from this knowledge.