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Teaching Information Literacy Online

Hal Grossman

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Mackey, T. P., & Jacobson, T. E. (Eds.). (2011). *Teaching information literacy online*. New York: Neal-Schuman. 200 pp. ISBN 978-1-55570-735-4. \$80.

This book is a collection of eight descriptions of online information literacy instruction projects at different universities. Each of these projects is an example of cooperation between librarians and teaching faculty. Ideally, one would hope to learn what kinds of online material work with which students and in what settings, and what kinds do not. One would also hope to learn how to grasp that will-o-the-wisp of the academic reference librarian, the wholehearted cooperation of teaching faculty. But the program description, or the “how we did it” type of article, is a form too often hampered by excessive local detail. Too little attention goes to just what the authors learned and how the reader might apply these lessons at her own institution. There are indeed lessons to be learned in this book, but the reader will have to dig for them.

The book has two parts, comprised of four chapters each, on “blended and hybrid learning” and on “open and online learning.” In the blended/hybrid category is a chapter that discusses how the authors led students in using a wiki to create research guides in Renaissance literature at the University of Central Florida. The authors found that this exercise helped to improve the quality of the sources that students used. At the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, librarians and instructors created reusable learning objects to teach college students about Boolean operators, truncation, reading citations, and distinguishing primary from secondary sources.

On the graduate level, another chapter involves a course in media and information literacy at the University of Manchester (England) School of Education. The authors hoped to teach their students how to create lesson plans that drew from each of five “frames” of information literacy—content, competence, learning to learn, personal relevance, and social impact. Of 32 online portfolios that the education students created, half touched on all five of the frames. The program seems to have been at least somewhat successful in imparting a holistic view of information literacy, a commendable goal. But the account in this book, one of several the authors have written, is heavy on theory at the expense of technique, which limits its usefulness to the practicing librarian.

At Morehead State University in Kentucky, a librarian and a history instructor worked together on a global studies course. They first collaborated in a traditional, face-to-face setting for two years. Then, in the third year, they taught the course online. Students read about the Vietnam War and were each given a “fate card” describing a kind of person involved in the war, such as a U.S. Navy nurse aboard a hospital ship. The students were asked to respond to questions about their person, based on online research. This technique is one that is easily replicated elsewhere,

and not overly encumbered by theoretical scaffolding. The authors, to their credit, discuss two problems that are made worse in the online setting: the tendency of students to think that they already know how to do research, and plagiarism. On the bright side, the online format freed some students from self-consciousness, allowing them to assume more fully the persona of their fate cards. But one topic mentioned only in passing could have been the focus of a chapter: The online format made it harder for the librarian to model how to narrow a topic or to evaluate sources. Although the authors created online guides, many students seemed not to have looked at them. These concerns get closer to the heart of the problems and potential of online teaching than does the emphasis on IL theory found elsewhere in this volume.

The open and online portion of the book starts with a chapter on by a social work professor and a librarian at the UK's Open University. They explain how they taught practicing social workers the information literacy skills needed to do evidence-based social work. The authors stressed both IL concepts and computer skills, since many of their students were unfamiliar with going online to answer complex research questions. The authors assessed only a small sample of students, but it appears that the structured online assignments that they employed did help their students to take advantage of online information in their social work practice. This useful chapter is followed by one on teaching at New Mexico State University through avatars in the Second Life "virtual world." Another chapter treats a constructivist, team-based approach to designing online graduate accounting courses at the University of Connecticut. This approach is appealing in its student-centeredness, but, again, the discussion is top-heavy with theory and short on usable, practical ideas. A final and interesting chapter describes how a librarian and a teaching faculty member reversed roles to design an online IL course at Indiana State University. The librarian acted as the lead course developer, with the professor as guide and consultant.

Some ideas in this volume lie half-submerged in detailed program descriptions that could more profitably have been the subject of extended analysis. For example, one group of authors designed reusable learning objects that included text, sound, and visuals, in an attempt to reach students with differing learning styles. A chapter on learning styles and online IL teaching could have been valuable. Another pair of authors scaffolded research assignments, from highly directed to abstract and open-ended, in an effort to instill confidence in their students. A chapter that dealt with scaffolding and student affect could have been of more use than a program description.

Another limitation of this book is the print medium. It is hard at times to know exactly what the authors produced for their teaching, and how it looks, feels, and behaves online. A website linked to the book's content would have been helpful. In

sum, there are some good ideas here, but this book is surely not the last word about online IL teaching or collaboration with faculty.

Hal Grossman
Reference/Instructional Librarian
Hunter College Library