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CUNY's LILAC as a Model for a Large Urban University Professional Development Organization

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CUNY' LILAC

Running head: CUNY's LILAC

CUNY's LILAC as a Model for a Large Urban University Professional Development Organization

Abstract

The present study addresses the history of the Library Information Literacy Advisory Committee (LILAC), a voluntary professional organization at City University of New York (CUNY). The author discusses the circumstances leading to the committee's formation, its growth, transformation, and its role in the professional development of CUNY librarians. Data collection was done by means of interviews held with past and present members of the committee. The interview questions were deliberated at LILAC's meeting and sent to the interviewees by email. The interviews' questions and answers were later grouped into three major categories: the original goals for the committee; the transformation of the goals and the committee's structure; the most important accomplishments and the future of the committee. Additional information needed for the study not found in the interviews was drawn from archival documents and publications. The committee's functions are explored as a model of an academic professional organization at a large urban university, and suggestions are given on how to follow the path.

Keywords: LILAC, CUNY, librarians' professional organization, professional development

Introduction

CUNY's Library Information Literacy Advisory Committee (LILAC) celebrated its tenth anniversary in February 2015. A decade ago twenty librarians from all CUNY libraries came together to review the mission of a new professional committee and establish its charge. Since then the committee members have been working hard and have succeeded in integrating information literacy across City University curriculums. LILAC members have been creating information literacy tutorials and assessment tools, providing support to CUNY librarians, and coordinating and running professional development meetings, seminars, and conferences.

When the author attended LILAC's meeting in September 2013 as a new member to the committee it was represented by a compelling, collaborative group of professionals who were well aware of the committee's goals and were working enthusiastically to achieve these goals. It was decided at the meeting to work on a publication depicting ten years of LILAC's history. The author undertook the task considering it as an opportunity to investigate how a voluntary professional organization could influence and develop librarians' work perspectives. It was agreed unanimously that the future publication would be based on the interviews with the committee's past and present members. The assumption was that the interviewees would recall facts and data from the history of the organization, and reflect on their personal experience. Based on the interviews the author should have had enough material and information for the publication. The interview questions were discussed at LILAC's meeting in March 2014. The answers from the interviewees were received by May-June 2014, and all seemed to be in place to start writing. However, very soon the author discovered that the interviews could only serve as a start point for the journey into the committee's past. The story didn't want to be put together. A decade of hard, enthusiastic, and dedicated work of the committee's members could not be recreated based on the interviews alone. Other sources of information, besides memories and reflections, were badly needed. Feeling the shortage of supportive documents the author started searching for the archival papers from the early times of the committee, looking for the evidence when exactly the committee was established, and why it was needed. Some information could be found buried deep inside CUNY Portal webpages, some at the bottom of LILAC members' desk drawers. An unpublished book chapter written by the first LILAC's co-convenor, Dr. Lucinda Zoe, CUNY's Dean for Undergraduate Studies, provided valuable information on the provisions that led to the formation of the committee. This publication was written by Dr. Zoe for a book on General Education activities across CUNY. However, the editors of the book, CUNY Office of Undergraduate Studies, decided not to include library activities in the anthology and the chapter remained unpublished. Nevertheless, this unpublished chapter contained facts and data concerning the first days of LILAC activities that could not be found anywhere else.

CUNY' LILAC

The author expresses great appreciation to the interviewees: Curtis Kendrick, University Dean for Libraries and Information Resources; Marie Cimino Spina, Institutional Archivist and Public Service Librarian at LaGuardia Community College; Professor Alexandra de Luise, Coordinator of Instructional Services at Queens College Rosenthal Library; Professor Mariana Regalado, the Head of Information Services at the Brooklyn College Library; and Professor Robert Farrell, Coordinator of Information Literacy and Assessment at Lehman College Leonard Lief Library. Special thanks go to Professor de Luise's for her archival skills and affection in preserving old papers that gave me the possibility to access LILAC's documents starting from the beginning of 2005. The minutes of the committee's meetings, projects description, published and unpublished documentation, conferences reports, members' correspondence, and other important documents were enormously helpful in recreating committee's activities, in analyzing its progression and transformations. A special gratitude goes to the first LILAC's co-convenor, Dr. Zoe.

In this publication the author explores factors that preceded the creation of a professional organization that is intended to serve as an advisor to CUNY senior management in libraries with regard to the role of the information literacy. The leading position of the committee in integrating information literacy across the City University curriculums will be described and evaluated. The structure of the committee and its adaption to the changing needs will be investigated. The author attempts to scrutinize and evaluate LILAC past and present projects and professional development activities based on the information collected during the interviews and gathered from the archival documents. The functions of LILAC will be explored as a model of an academic professional organization, and suggestions will be given on how to follow its path.

Question 1: What are the origins of LILAC, what was the original goal for the group?

CUNY is one of the largest urban universities in the United States. It comprises of eleven senior colleges, seven community colleges, and five graduate and professional schools. The University's library system embraces 28 academic libraries with more than 350 librarians who all have faculty status. As faculty members, CUNY librarians provide students and departmental faculty with a high level of professional library services, at the same time doing research, publishing, teaching, and leading information literacy programs. CUNY Central Office of Library Services (OLS), directed by the University Dean for Libraries and Information Resources, pays close attention to the information literacy projects across the University in collaboration with CUNY Council of Chief Librarians. For many years

CUNY' LILAC

these two groups have unified librarians' efforts to create common and collaborative information literacy sources that may be shared by all CUNY libraries.

The idea of a CUNY-wide Information Literacy initiative started right after the Middle States Commission on Higher Education had revised its standards for accreditation and identified information literacy as an essential element of any general curriculum (Zoe, 2006). The draft of the new Middle States Commission on Higher Education guidelines was published in November 2000. Shortly after that, on April 16, 2001 CUNY's Council of Chief Librarians reviewed University Library related policies and published a *CUNY Council of Chief Librarians Information Literacy White Paper* which defined the elevated significance of librarians' role as faculty in participation in students' education.

"The White Paper, drafted by chief librarians on each campus, received wide recognition and excited many of us," remembered Alexandra de Luise. "It called for CUNY-wide recognition of information literacy, with training, partnerships, ongoing studies, and campus task forces." The White Paper invited University provosts to appoint the task forces with not only librarians, but those with "expertise on learning theory, instructional design, and testing; as well as teaching faculty who effectively incorporate library research or IL into their courses" to participate in it (CUNY Council of Chief Librarians, 2001). "Not every piece came to fruition, but it set the stage for the formation of the LILAC Committee," added de Luise.

According to Lucinda Zoe, an Information Literacy Working Group was formed by the CUNY Central Office of Library Services in 2000. The Working Group investigated a number of Information Literacy tutorials and selected nine tutorials from "Information Competence Project" developed at Colorado State University. The rights to use and modify these tutorials were arranged for CUNY. By January 2002 the Working Group had modified the first of the nine tutorials. It was a tedious and challenging process.

Mariana Regalado and Marie Spina served at the Working Group from the beginning. "It was successful in the sense that we did it and we worked really-really hard at it. But we also learned the hard way how very difficult is to maintain a useful tutorial on volunteer time," said Regalado. Marie Spina followed: "we had little or no technical web design skills; no special web designer was part of the group." The Working Group's activities and challenges faced by its members attested to the need for a larger professional organization capable to deal with the issues. At the end of 2003, almost four years after the new Middle States Standards were published it became clear that there were no CUNY-wide Information Literacy resource or program available. LILAC initiation became a logical developmental process of integrating the information literacy into the University curriculums.

Dr. Zoe, Chief Librarian at Hostos Community College Library at the time, wrote:

CUNY' LILAC

Thus, a few members of the Working Group, along with the Chair of the Chief's IL Task Force, convened a meeting in June 2004 to discuss the status of the CUNY IL Tutorial and make a realistic assessment of what should be done regarding continued revision, updates and maintenance... They proposed the creation of a formalized committee that would have a solid foundation with concrete support from both the Office of Library Services and the Council of Chief Librarians. All CUNY Libraries would benefit from a comprehensive effort that would provide us with the resources we need to move our individual plans and programs forward. (Zoe, 2006)

“We started LILAC in 2004 when the position of the University Librarian became more a part of the CUNY central academic structure,” said Regalado. “We saw it as opportunity to advise the University Librarian on issues related to information literacy, as well as to coordinate information literacy across CUNY.”

According to the present LILAC website the charge to the Committee is advising the Council of Chief Librarians and the University Librarian with regard to integrating information literacy across the City University curriculum, developing information literacy support materials, including assessment tools, and sponsoring information literacy related professional development activities.

From the beginning all committee members were Coordinators of Instruction at the individual colleges or actively involved in teaching Library courses. Key members in the early years were: Jerry Bornstein who had been with the Newman Library of Baruch College since 1994, Kathy Killoran from John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Miriam Laskin from Hostos College Library, Alexandra de Luise from Queens College, Edward Owasu-Ansah from College of Staten Island Library, Mariana Regalado from Brooklyn College, Marie Spina from LaGuardia Community College, Polly Thistlethwaite (now a Chief Librarian at the CUNY Graduate Center), Tess Tobin from NYC College of Technology Library, and others.

“I began my tenure as University Librarian in September 2004, and LILAC was formed around that time,” said Curtis Kendrick. “The purpose of LILAC was to inform me and the Council of Chief Librarians of matters relating to information literacy, and to provide a forum for practitioners to come together to discuss IL and related subjects. I do recall a lot of enthusiasm and energy for the committee as it began. People were very interested in sharing what they were working on. After a while the group began to coalesce more to have a university-wide perspective, and I think that perspective continues to this day.”

The name of the new committee was easy to choose. By that time there was a well-functioning CUNY Electronic Resources Advisory Committee (ERAC). “How the name – LILAC – was selected, why? Well, we knew it was the IL Advisory

CUNY' LILAC

Committee, so adding Library to the beginning made sense to us, though we talked about it a bit. In a way there didn't seem to be any way to avoid it," noticed Regalado.

The initial structure of LILAC was subcommittee-driven. Each subcommittee had its own tasks, meetings, members, and a junior and senior co-chair. This structure was considered to be flexible, and the idea was that committees would be formed and unformed as necessary. From 2005 to 2011 LILAC had four subcommittees: Articulation, Assessment, Information Literacy Tools, and Public Relations. The all-LILAC members' meeting was called twice each semester to discuss subcommittees' activity reports on ongoing activities, achievements, and goals. Every year committee would compile a report of its accomplishments and submit it to the Council of Chief Librarians.

The Information Literacy Working Group became The Information Literacy Tools subcommittee with the task to create a tutorial that would be accessed by all students and would serve as an assessment tool of Information Literacy skills. Later the tutorials created by Working Group were moved from University Central Office of Library Services website to Hostos College server and were also translated into Spanish. The Articulation subcommittee was charged to develop common objectives and information literacy standards for all CUNY students. The Assessment subcommittee was developing common assessment rubrics that would provide transparent criteria for information literacy skills evaluation and would be easy to use. The Public Relations subcommittee was charged to create LILAC website that would provide CUNY faculty with the resources needed to successfully integrate information literacy into their curricula. The website would reflect the work done by LILAC and by Information Literacy groups of the individual CUNY campuses. At the same time it would be designed in a way to be compliant and uniform with all of CUNY's webpages.

In 2005-2007 the Articulation subcommittee created and completed the CUNY-wide survey of library faculty on skills taught by library faculty during bibliographic instruction sessions. The members of subcommittee compared the survey data with ACRL information literacy standards and drafted a list of standards for CUNY students. At the same time the Assessment subcommittee reviewed rubrics from various sources and created vocabulary to describe different kinds of knowledge and skills. The pilot testing for new rubrics was arranged in two CUNY colleges - Queensborough Community College and Borough of Manhattan Community College in order to examine rubrics' partnership between the library and the disciplinary faculty. Students' research papers from English and Art courses were analyzed and the pilot resulted in shortening the rubrics and clarifying its descriptions. The new rubrics and information literacy standards were reviewed, discussed, and amended by all LILAC members, and in 2008 the new CUNY standards, created by LILAC, were approved by the Council of Chief Librarian and by the CUNY

CUNY' LILAC

Provost's Council. The standards were posted on the CUNY Portal as common learning objectives for CUNY students across the university. In 2010 the Articulation subcommittee ran a survey on the use of new CUNY standards. The importance of this project was obvious: "These learning objectives ensure that regardless of where a student may first be enrolled, there will be a common expectation of the skills that students are developing with respect to information literacy by the time that achieve sixty credit hours" (Ellis et al., 2013, p. 93).

When reading through the early LILAC meetings' minutes the author was impressed by the wide range of the activities the committee members were engaged in. Just few extracts from the meetings' minutes:

- April 6th, 2005. It was decided that LILAC website would be on the CUNY Libraries sites; a draft of Articulation Survey was shown and discussed; it was decided that Zoe and Kendrick would make a presentation on Information Literacy to the CUNY Gen Ed Committee;
- May 12th, 2005. The Articulation subcommittee's report was discussed; the Tutorial subcommittee's report was discussed; The Public Relations subcommittee's report was discussed; the Assessment subcommittee's report was discussed;
- September 7th, 2005. It was decided that each member of LILAC should identify and contact campus CUE coordinators; it was decided to identify and contact campus assessment committees, etc.

"I've been very impressed by LILAC's ability to work across the system to develop CUNY-wide information literacy learning goals and objectives," said Kendrick. "One of the first LILAC projects was an articulation survey on information literacy outcomes that paved the road to development and outline of the learning goals and objectives for students through 60 credits, and later to the draft of information literacy guidelines of skills for students through 120 credits."

"I think the early articulation surveys and the outcomes for students at 60 credits document were important ways LILAC has helped the libraries become less insular," added Farrell, the present LILAC's co-convener. "LILAC has really helped bring some transparency to what people are doing across campuses with respect to teaching and learning and that has been its biggest contribution from the beginning."

The first five years of LILAC's activities proved that the committee was able to fully articulate the need for integration of information literacy in the disciplines within CUNY. "As an organization it has evolved significantly over the years to sustain its viability and vitality. The success of LILAC derives very much from its members who have a great deal of latitude to work on projects that they feel will be of value to the University," noticed Curtis Kendrick.

CUNY' LILAC

Question 2: How has the structure of LILAC changed over time? Does LILAC serve its purpose?

As previously stated, LILAC began its work as a group of goal oriented subcommittees. This subcommittee-driven structure allowed the committee's members to realize their own potentials throughout different domains. Librarians had the possibility to use and share their own experience with the peers, and, at the same time to develop professionally in pursuing the organization's goals. "Much of the LILAC work was done through subcommittees. I spent a good number of years on the subcommittee involved in enhancing the CUNY Competency tutorials," said de Luise. "After serving as a co-chair in 2007, and feeling that I contributed all I could to this particular subcommittee, I moved on to the Public Relations committee in 2008. One of the strengths of LILAC was the ability to move around to another subcommittee without prejudice or hard feelings." Thus the

By 2008 there were a large number of new electronic tools that could be used by faculty and students increasing their interest in building information literacy initiatives, and attracting collaborative opportunities. A new objective emerged for LILAC's members in sharing information literacy-related resources for use across all CUNY campuses. The other new goal and wider concern of the committee was the need to implement information literacy within the disciplines and among teaching and learning centers at each of the campuses. Trying to find new and more effective ways to serve these new goals LILAC's members slowly shifted the focus and the structure of the committee towards organizing efforts around particular projects.

Farrell described his experience with the changing committee's structure and noted that "this allowed us to be more flexible about taking on new projects/ initiatives. To some degree, we've become more decentralized. Anyone on the committee can propose new projects and can find associate members in CUNY to help with them once those projects are approved. We've also cut down on the amount of minutes/formal meetings that occur over the course of the year, thereby avoiding some bureaucratic busywork and freeing people up to do other things. "

In order to ascertain the purposefulness of LILAC, some concrete examples of the organization's work should be discussed. At the time this publication was written LILAC's members concentrated their efforts on a few ongoing projects which ought to be mentioned. The project called "Integrating Information Literacy in the Disciplines" focused on the development of a CUNY-wide model for integrating information literacy in the disciplines was started during Fall semester of 2013. Under this project umbrella LILAC organized in 2013-2014 academic year two workshops for CUNY librarians and disciplinary faculty dedicated to help the two entities to collaboratively articulate desired information seeking behaviors of CUNY graduates in the disciplines. During the workshops the different phases of the

CUNY' LILAC

process were discussed and the guidelines on how to prepare and hold the conversations between librarians and disciplinary faculty were outlined. Currently, five colleges within CUNY system are at the various stages of piloting the project. There are more workshops scheduled by LILAC for the 2014-2015 academic years and beyond. Farrell noticed that “seeing the ‘Integrating Information Literacy in the Disciplines’ project beginning to pick up steam” has been for him the “most rewarding experience as a professional so far.”

The other rolling project aims to explore possible ways CUNY can collaborate with New York public libraries. LILAC's members met with the representatives from New York Public Library, Brooklyn Public Library, and Queens Public Library to discuss the ways academic and public libraries can help each other in serving current library mission and workflows.

The “Guide on the Side Sandbox” project should be mentioned as well. Regalado said that she had “high, if tempered, hopes for our current exploration of the Guide on the Side project” which targets the creation of online tutorials embedded in the CUNY libraries electronic databases webpages.

Lately the committee members have been engaged in more outreach to other parts of the University. “We’ve also made presentations to the university’s Coordinated Undergraduate Education Committee, the cross campus Writing Across the Curriculum and Writing in the Disciplines groups, and the University’s Centers for Teaching and Learning group,” said Farrell. “We’re beginning to present at conferences on some of LILAC’s work, which is a new thing as well.” Some of the recent professional events sponsored and co-sponsored by LILAC for CUNY librarians and for larger audience include the following:

In April 2012 LILAC and Gale co-sponsored a session “Workplace Readiness: Gaps in Critical Thinking Skills of Early Career Professionals.” This event presented a chance for librarians and disciplinary faculty to hear the opinions of different New York City employers about the level of critical thinking skills for early career professionals required to succeed in the workforce. Representatives from various fields were invited to John Jay College to speak with an audience of librarians, subject faculty, and CUNY career development specialists.

In May 2013 the committee organized an exciting half-day session called “Computers and Crowds: Unexpected Authors and Their Impact on Scholarly Research” that took place in CUNY’s Graduate School of Journalism. Librarians from all CUNY colleges were introduced to new content production models by Google and other search engines.

In Spring 2014 during the workshop “From Stale to Stellar: Practical innovations for teaching information literacy” LILAC representatives discussed the practical

CUNY' LILAC

ways to reinvigorate library instruction, including new instructional approaches such as flipped classrooms, gaming, and distance learning.

The program “Librarians on the Threshold: An Overview and Panel Discussion of ACRL’s Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education” was a collaboration between LILAC and the Association of College and Research Libraries, New York division, and Barnard College Library in Fall 2014 and attracted a large audience from New York and New Jersey.

The committee pays great attention to the professional development and intellectual stimulation of its members. The well-known professionals have been invited to speak at the LILAC’s meetings. Professor Trudi Jacobson, Head of the Information Literacy Department for the University at Albany Libraries and co-chair of the ACRL IL Competency Standards Task Force discussed new information literacy threshold concepts and use of badges to motivate students’ learning during March, 2014 LILAC’s meeting. In September 2014 Professor Di Su, Head of Reference from York College presented his new book “Library Instruction Design: Learning from Google and Apple.” Professor Brian Winterman of Indiana University spoke on his library database project called ILIAD in November 2014. These meetings and discussions have inspired the committee’s members to think about, adopt and implement new knowledge and ideas.

Question 3: What are some important accomplishments of LILAC over the years, and how do you see the future of the committee?

When answering this question all the interviewees were amazingly unanimous. They emphasized LILAC’s ability to steer the direction of its work towards the unification of the potentials existing at all twenty eight CUNY’s libraries. The projects guided by the committee have provided all CUNY librarians with the opportunities to improve the level of their professionalism, to get to know each other, and to meet the masters in the field. By taking part in the committee’s initiatives its members have learned how to lead and how to follow. LILAC’s programs and events promoted information literacy policies within the very different frameworks of the individual CUNY campuses and libraries

LILAC’s members expressed their strongest appreciation of the committee’s value and its most important accomplishments. Spina pointed out that “the most valuable products of LILAC were the opening avenues of communication across the University Libraries.” For de Luise “one of the best reasons to be on the committee was the collaboration with other CUNY librarians.” Farrell accentuated LILAC’s “work done around organizing librarians to advocate for IL and resources for IL. When new initiatives arose at the administrative level,” he said, “we worked to craft language in LILAC that all libraries could use to position themselves with respect

CUNY' LILAC

to the new initiatives.” Regalado expressed her certainty that LILAC “serves, and will continue to serve, as a forum for communication and collaboration across CUNY libraries on issues related to information literacy.” Kendrick, valued the role of the committee as “a very effective example of collaboration at CUNY.”

The interviewee’s responses to the question “How do you see the future of LILAC?” should be quoted directly:

- Regalado: “I hope that LILAC will find useful ways to create learning objects that can serve all CUNY libraries. I think a challenge for CUNY libraries as a whole is to find better ways to support the establishment and maintenance of shared learning objects.”
- Spina: “I am very hopeful that collaboration will continue to be encouraged. Our students need and deserve guidance we can provide for the essential cognitive role inherent in what we call information literacy.”
- de Luise: “Through the committee work and meetings we have held I have had the privilege for these past ten plus years, of learning from other colleagues doing similar or more interesting things at their libraries. They have given me great ideas, they have motivated me and their energy and commitment have inspired me.”
- Farrell: “I would like to see LILAC work towards developing a “CUNY philosophy” of teaching and learning in the libraries, something that allows us to coordinate our efforts and leverage our resources to increase our professional abilities through professional development.”
- Kendrick: “I would like to see LILAC become integrated into the work that is being done between CUNY and the NYPL Department of Education. The current DOE/CUNY Collaborative has developed one model that has been more curriculum based, but I think there are other avenues that can be explored between the two systems that speak more directly to information literacy. I think too that there is a lot more work that needs to be done in reaching out to faculty to help them understand their responsibility in fostering information literacy among students.”

LILAC as a model for voluntary professional organization

Since its start LILAC had a twofold role: advisory and coordinating. Acting as the “advisors” to CUNY’s Office of Library Services, the committee’s members interpreted the new Middle States Information Literacy requirements and adapted them to the needs of a large urban university. The committee’s members paid

CUNY' LILAC

particular attention that the new standards would be common for both community and senior colleges. “One of the most important accomplishments of LILAC to date has been the development of a common set of learning objectives across the university for information literacy” (Ellis et al, 2013, p. 93). Acting as the “coordinator” the committee played a role of a clearinghouse for information literacy materials, and for information about University-wide information literacy projects and initiatives. “The group members have been responsible for several professional development programs and presentations at conferences” (Ellis et al, 2013, p. 92).

This CUNY-wide professional organization, its structure, achievements, and ongoing work is worthy of serving as a model of a successful voluntary professional development management group. Reading through the interviewees’ answers one could easily pick-up the enthusiasm and great satisfaction of LILAC’s members for their committee.

The benefits of one’s involvement in a professional organization are of great magnitude and essence. By participating in professional organization activities, we realize and develop our own potentials. Every meeting, every seminar and conference, every committee we serve on teaches us something. Professional organizations alert us about changes in the field and help us to keep abreast of the new developments. They take our professionalism to the next level, regardless of age or experience. The involvement in a professional organization is as important to a novice in a career and as it is to a distinguished guru.

The history of ten years of LILAC’s activities proves that a voluntary professional organization formed around an issue (in this case – information literacy), provides its members and a larger audience with opportunities for personal development and collaboration. LILAC’s project “Articulating and Integrating Information Literacy Outcomes” may serve as a perfect example of collaborative work of its members. The CUNY integration model for situating IL in the disciplines outlined at LILAC website (CUNY, 2014) started its successful implementation throughout university and beyond (Farrell and Badke, 2015). The committee’s structure could be adapted to the new trends in the discipline. The committee’s activities driven by its members’ intelligence, enthusiasm, cheerfulness and commitment continue to aim the new targets.

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