Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Librarian-Lead Faculty Learning Communities Offer Opportunities for Collaboration

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Evidence Summary

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Abstract

Objective – To describe a librarian-lead faculty learning community (FLC) focused on data literacy.

Design – Case study.

Setting – A public university in Florida.

Subjects – 10 participants in the FLC.

Methods – Two librarians proposed the Data Literacy Across the Curriculum FLC as part of the University of South Florida St. Petersburg Center for Innovation in Teaching and Learning. Participants were recruited from all full-time instructional faculty. The group met for monthly 90-minute meetings throughout the fall and spring semesters. Meetings were focused on group goal-setting, lightning talks, open discussion, data tool demonstrations, and the planning and development of work projects. In addition, the group designed an informal survey on the use of data tools across the institution.

Main Results – At the conclusion of the year-long FLC, the group developed a frame for data literacy competencies that can be utilized across the curriculum. The FLC participants created a Data Literacy Faculty Toolkit that presented that theoretical framework, as well as providing sample activities and other resources to help faculty to practically implement that framework into their instruction. The student success librarian also integrated data literacy into the first-year student information literacy curriculum.

Conclusion – Participation and facilitation of the FLC by librarians served to further librarian-faculty collaboration, as well as demonstrating library value. The work of the Data Literacy Across the Curriculum FLC raised awareness about information and data literacy on campus, and provided support to faculty members looking to further integrate data literacy into their instruction.

Commentary

Increasing collaboration with faculty members and improving librarian input into the curriculum are common challenges of academic librarians, as evidenced by the extensive literature on the subject (Atkinson, 2018). Participation in faculty learning communities (FLCs) represents a promising opportunity to address some of these challenges. However, as the authors of this study note, there is a large gap in the literature regarding librarian participation in FLCs. This case study offers a welcome addition to the literature, particularly as a case study of not only librarian participation in an FLC, but a librarian-led FLC.

This study was robust when appraised using the Critical Appraisal of a Case Study checklist (Center for Evidence-Based Management, 2014). A case study is the ideal format for presenting research like this study, given that the sample size and scope is limited by nature. The methodology was well-described and the authors thoroughly highlighted both the challenges and successes of their FLC. In particular, they noted the challenge of balancing the need to communicate and work together effectively within a limited amount of time with the benefits of informal conversation and team-building to the productivity of the group.

One of the most notable aspects of the authors' project was that they were not only participants in the FLC, but they also proposed and facilitated the FLC themselves. This was a good illustration of how taking initiative and being a proactive member of the institutional community is an essential part of increasing collaboration. In addition, they also chose as their subject a topic where they lacked subject-matter expertise. This allowed for the faculty and librarians to learn together, providing an opportunity for collaborative learning as well as collaborative work.

This study would be of particular interest to academic librarians who are interested in participating in or leading an FLC, as well as any librarian interested in facilitating increased collaboration with colleagues outside of the library. Academic librarians interested in data literacy at their own institutions would find the study to be a good overview of the subject as well as a potential model for building support for data literacy at their own institutions. It also opened up the possibility for further research and deeper analysis on academic librarian participation in FLCs and collaborative learning across the institution. In particular, follow-up research into how this participation and the resulting work products influenced faculty and student success would be valuable.

References

Atkinson, J. (2018). Collaboration and academic libraries: An overview and literature review. In *Collaboration and the Academic Library* (pp. 11-33). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-102084-5.00002-X

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