

Chapter 12

Librarian and Peer Research Mentor Partnerships that Promote Student Success

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the evolution of the University of New Hampshire (UNH) Manchester Research Mentor Program, a cross-campus collaboration that trains writing tutors to assist students with information literacy skills. The first half of the chapter documents the first iteration of the Research Mentor Program, describing the recruitment, training, tutoring activities, and evaluation of the writing tutors/research mentors; the integration of the research mentors in First-Year Writing classroom library instruction sessions and writing tutorials; and the results of a three-semester evaluation study of the program's effectiveness at teaching composition students the information skills they will need to develop as writers, researchers, and critical thinkers. The second half of the chapter describes the Research Mentor Program's transformation as librarians, learning center staff, and classroom instructors adapted the program's goals by integrating the vision of the Association of College and Research Libraries' Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education into their pedagogy.

INTRODUCTION

To help students develop the information literacy and writing skills essential for college-level learning, members of the University of New Hampshire at Manchester's academic community have collaborated to enhance those skills. The Research Mentor Program, an alliance between the UNH Manchester Library and the Center for Academic Enrichment (CAE), integrates the services of library and learning

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0326-2.ch012

center by recognizing their shared mission to set students on the path of research and writing fluency. Indeed, such cooperation between an academic library and a campus learning center is intuitive because, as Montgomery and Robertshaw (2015) asserted, “[e]ffective writing depends on competent research” (p. 56). The UNH Manchester collaboration has enabled librarians, in partnership with CAE staff, to further develop students as information literate individuals.

In typical library instruction and reference interactions, librarians help students find and assess the information needed for their writing assignments, but they are often not situated to assist with source analysis and integration in the drafting process. In typical writing tutorials, peer tutors pick up that baton by helping students with clear argumentation and source integration. Because writing and research are a “holistic integrated process” (Gruber, Knefel, & Waelchli, 2008, p. 101), it is advantageous for librarians, learning center staff, and peer tutors to work together to improve student learning. The Research Mentor Program recognizes the overlapping roles of librarians and tutors and integrates their work with students into a cohesive instructional whole. The UNH Manchester tutors work at the intersection of the Library and the CAE: they help students at every point of the research and writing process. While students sometimes hesitate to approach a library reference desk for research help, they are more at ease talking to a skilled peer about their writing (Montgomery & Robertshaw, 2015); the peer tutors can then create a link to the librarians. As Gruber et al. (2008) found at the University of Dubuque, the tutors “play[ed] a critical role [by] providing the bridge between students and the faculty, librarians, and writing professionals” (p. 111). Peer tutors plant the seed that the library is an accessible place to seek research help and by doing so reach a larger portion of students (O’Kelly, Garrison, Merry, & Torreano, 2015).

BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Practitioners in both libraries and tutoring centers are capitalizing on this natural synergy: a review of the recent literature reveals a growing trend of academic libraries collaborating with tutoring and writing centers to provide services that enhance students’ reading, writing, critical thinking, and research skills. Many of these partnerships stem from the housing of both entities in a shared space, usually called a “learning commons” (Montgomery & Robertshaw, 2015). Proximity breeds teamwork as learning center staff and librarians, finding themselves working physically side-by-side, recognize their common goals relative to student development. In addition, librarians are tapping into the value of peer support in an academic setting by using library student workers and/or tutors as resources in the classroom and at the reference desk. At Northwest College, co-locating the library, writing center, and peer tutoring center in the learning commons led to a sense of a shared learning environment, with tutors utilizing the entire space to work with students (Dechert, Richards, Zawacki, & Giroud, 2014). Librarians at Rollins College, seeing the writing tutors staffing the central help desk, decided to train library student workers in basic research skills; the students are now the “first point of contact” for patrons seeking library assistance and refer information seekers to a librarian for more in-depth consultations (Montgomery & Robertshaw, 2015, p. 65). The librarians also train some tutors about library services so that they may refer tutees to the reference desk when appropriate. At Grand Valley State University, librarians recruit and train students to be “peer research consultants” who provide information literacy skills assistance to students. The research consultants work at the service desk with tutors from the Writing Center and the Speech Lab (O’Kelly et al., 2015). At other institutions, the library/learning center collaboration takes place predominantly in the classroom. At the University of Dubuque, librarians, discipline faculty

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