

Chapter 16

Librarian as Collaborator: Bringing E-Learning 2.0 Into the Classroom by Way of the Library

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors explore the role of academic librarians in the e-learning 2.0 environment. Librarians are excellent partners in developing e-learning 2.0 spaces with faculty, because they are already familiar with many web 2.0 technologies being used in these environments. The authors explore how libraries and librarians have traditionally served their patrons, and how the library is currently becoming a collaborative technology center serving increasingly tech-savvy students. With this in mind, the authors define e-learning 2.0 and examine the history behind the development of the concept. They also address the librarian's role as it pertains to information literacy on campus and collaboration with faculty in order to facilitate the e-learning process. The chapter concludes with a focus on how librarians can help bring e-learning 2.0 into the classroom through faculty workshops, consultations, and embedding of librarians within classes.

INTRODUCTION: LIBRARIES BRIDGING THE TECHNOLOGY DIVIDE

Academic libraries are critical to the success and growth of their institutions and have often been referred to as the heart of the college or university. Traditionally the academic library was the place on

campus where scholarship occurred. It was where students and faculty went to do research, to find a quiet place to study, to check out materials, and to get assistance from a librarian in order to locate bits and chunks of information hidden away on dusty shelves or tucked into squeaky microform drawers. The library served the campus and its constituents as a sacred repository of the printed word and the academic librarian was its loyal custodian. Fifty

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60566-788-1.ch016

years ago students most likely viewed the library as a necessary burden, a solemn and unsocial place to be visited when required by their professors and dictated by their assignments.

[t]he Library has no outward and visible reward to offer its devotees. Even to many who might become devotees it seems like a cold and dusty place, where the books are locked away in distant 'stacks' which the student cannot visit, and which are too often presided over by male or female dragons whose obvious aim seems to be to protect them from those who wish to use them (Tinker, 1955, p. 167).

Today, much has changed in regards to the library as place and the role of the librarian. The academic library still holds and preserves the printed word and still exists as a venerated place of scholarship, but it has shaken off its dust and attempted to transform into the new social butterfly on campus. In the past two decades, the academic library has rapidly evolved into a warehouse of technology, a center for digitization, a multimedia hub, and a rejuvenated space for collaboration and exploration. This process, still taking place in academic libraries across the world, has unquestionably led to the sacrifice of numerous traditional spaces, heaps of print volumes, and loads of shelving in order to make room for more collaborative and social spaces such as computer labs, cafes, media/listening rooms, auditoriums, learning centers, information commons, study rooms, and classrooms. The library is adapting to meet the needs and the demands of its newest generation of users. Freeman, talking about library as place, says that in order to remain a vital presence on campus, the library must support its members in new and experimental ways. It must be flexible in order to accommodate evolving information technologies and must be able and willing to become a laboratory for new ways of teaching and learning. "Rather than threatening the traditional concept of the library, the integration of new information technology has actually become the catalyst that transforms the library into

a more vital and critical intellectual center of life at colleges and universities today" (2005, p. 2).

As libraries change to meet the needs of the students and the academic community, so must the roles of the librarians. Librarians have had to adapt to the ever-changing library landscape by continually reinventing their roles and keeping their skills up-to-date and in-tune with new technologies, tools, resources, and services. And, in turn, they need to be able to educate their users in navigating this new landscape while promoting new services and resources across the campus. Librarians are no longer dragonish guardians of the printed word. They are teachers, technologists, innovators, and campus advocates who are focused on meeting student needs, supporting faculty in the classroom, and maintaining a vital presence on campus.

Academic librarianship has excelled at grasping the significance and potential of technology as a powerful force in transforming our profession and what we contribute to higher education. Librarians are in every sense of the word, technologists. Yet, we have largely maintained what is referred to as the "high touch," the ability to balance technology with humanism and an overarching focus on student-centered service (Bell & Shank, 2004, p. 373).

Most traditional students entering college today are considered to be digital natives (Prensky, 2001). They have grown up with digital technology, computers and the Internet and they expect to be able to communicate and socialize online at any time and in any place. They are mobile and connected at the same time, texting, chatting, emailing, searching the web, streaming audio, and often doing all of this from the same device. These students expect to be able to customize, configure, format, download and move seamlessly from one place to another, and one application to another, without restrictions. "Technology is something that adapts to their needs, not something that requires them to change" (Roberts, 2005, 3.2).

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