

---

# Course Outline and Training for School Library Assistants

Anita C. Bell

---

With the advent in 1985 of North Carolina's Basic Education Plan which mandated a minimum of 5.5 instructional hours per day, the category of student assistant in high school media centers was eliminated. Since most school libraries depended on the work contributed by student helpers, it became necessary to develop a curriculum with the requisite number of contact hours, work assignments, quizzes, and exams to justify an accredited course in library assistance.

In Wake County a committee was formed to create a course outline based on a prototype curriculum guide developed by the Division of School Media Programs for the State Board of Education. School librarians were asked to submit material used in the training of their students — handbooks, exercises, policy statements, and clerical forms. Dale Williams of Enloe High School and Marietta Franklin, now retired, compiled the information, provided background narrative when necessary, and designed exercises where needed. The result of their efforts was a 320-page source book entitled *Library Media Studies*. Its sheets can be removed for copying and its ideas can be adapted to the particular needs of each school media center.

## Course Overview

The Library Media Skills course was designed as an independent study program, allowing the students to participate in a hands-on learning experience with self-guided lessons. Instead of a traditional classroom environment, the Media Center became a laboratory for on-the-job training in which students gained knowledge of its functions and services.

The course outline focused on the orientation and organization of the media center, the selection and utilization of resources, the comprehension and application of concepts and information usage, the production and presentation of materials in a variety of formats, the knowledge and application of computer technology, and even

some enrichment activities such as literary appreciation, copyright laws, and public relations.

As indicated in the table of contents of the resources book, there are two instructional levels for many of the exercises included. Should a student enroll in the course for a second year, he or she can study various topics in greater depth and be involved in an expanded variety of tasks. Studies of other reference sources and more computer-related projects are also introduced. What follows is an account of the experience of Needham B. Broughton High School in Raleigh in implementing this new course.

The course was arranged for four nine week periods, with the first grading period concentrating heavily on library orientation and terminology; training in circulation processing and shelving procedures; and working with periodicals, microforms, and audiovisual hardware. During the second nine weeks, more audiovisual skills are developed; removing cards for discarded books is initiated; and the basic reference sources are emphasized. The third grading period focuses on computer skills with the word processing program *PFS: Write* and exposure to additional reference materials. Finally, the fourth session is devoted to learning the newly installed *DIALOG* service and helping the librarians with the seventeen to twenty research classes that are a standard daily occurrence.

Probably the major difficulty in implementing the new course was maintaining the required contact hours with the students when other classes, teachers, and chores demanded the librarian's time. A media coordinator easily could have spent all day teaching, but teaching had to be balanced with running a full library program. It was advantageous to remember while teaching media skills, that students were being trained as assistants and that their primary obligation in this course was to help with library operations.

While Broughton's library staff consisted of three media coordinators and one media assistant which enabled everyone to take turns working with the students, in a school media center with fewer personnel, the teaching aspect of this course

---

Anita C. Bell is Media Assistant at Needham B. Broughton High School in Raleigh.

would be difficult, if not impossible, without independent exercises. For this reason alone, the self-guided worksheets were invaluable resources.

### **The First Week**

On the first day of class, the new assistants watched a videotape designed to acquaint them with the library facility and staff. (Creating such an orientation video, if one does not already exist, is an excellent project for assistants. This videotape, shown to all incoming ninth-graders, is also appropriate for use with new teachers, community volunteers, and open-house events.) Following the viewing, the students filled out a brief biographical sketch, along with their full class schedules, which were kept on file. They were then given a looseleaf folder which contained the worksheets and handouts which would serve as their textbook for the semester. A walking tour of the school campus was provided so that students running library errands would know where the principals' and guidance counselors' offices, the auditorium, and the faculty lounge were located.

In addition to the video, another multipurpose tool was a detailed representation of the library facility. Students were given an unlabeled floor plan with a comprehensive list of items and areas to locate including everything from Dewey Classification areas, computer lab, and periodical room to vertical files, copiers, and microfiche cabinets. Even the wall clocks and pencil sharpeners were indicated in anticipation of two frequently asked questions. For two days the assistants were encouraged to explore, mark locations on their maps, open books and drawers, and become familiar with the physical space and the resources. At the end of the second class period, their discoveries, questions, or problems were reviewed and discussed. (This same floor plan, with detailed labels and library policies and hours of operation typed on the reverse side, can be used as a handout for new students, teachers, and visitors. Moreover, the map can also be posted at various locations throughout the library with a "You are here" indicator.)

### **Attendance and Assignments**

A sign-in sheet was kept at the circulation desk to serve as an attendance record and as an assignment chart for a designated period. The numbers next to the students' names on the sheet specified their particular duty for that time period. One student was always assigned to the circulation desk and another to audiovisuals. If more than two assistants were registered for that

period, some were assigned to the periodical room or the pass desk during the lunch hours. An end-of-the-year survey of the assistants revealed that the great majority of them preferred a job rotation every three or four weeks.

Since four members of the library staff were involved in the training and so much of a student's work was done independently, there were occasional communication problems. It proved worthwhile, therefore, to provide a bulletin board and/or clipboard near the desk for announcements, special duties, and notices from counselors and to have students sign or initial important memos.

While there were always numerous odd chores to be done, the predictable housekeeping tasks were staggered throughout the day to simplify the daily routines. Each period was assigned a specific job which was maintained all year outside of the monthly rotation: first period students emptied the book drops and carded the books, second period students delivered the AV films and equipment, third period students watered the plants.

### **Shelving**

With the registration dust settled, schedules fixed, the assistants counted, the shelf space was divided up, and each student was given an area of responsibility which involved reshelving books in that section and maintaining order and neatness. Students were encouraged to do this as soon as they signed in and before classes arrived. The necessity for regular checking was constantly stressed. Experience has shown that assigning students their own section, rather than random shelving and reading, fostered a sense of ownership and pride. If one student was faced with a deluge of books at one time, his or her classmates often helped out, knowing that this favor would be returned. In the case of a prolonged absence of an assistant, the others were encouraged to cover for the absentee and receive extra credit for their work. An "extra-credit" sign-up sheet was posted at the desk, and the student's contributions were considered when report card time approached.

Students learned shelving procedures by arranging call numbers in alphabetical and numerical order in written exercises. In this way a learning disability was often discovered before the student was turned loose on the shelves. The special education students assigned to the library often had difficulty with nonfiction numbers, but were able to shelve fiction, biography, and collective biography successfully. The procedure of checking the book pockets and reshelving the

books was done with staff supervision.

An outline of the Dewey Classification System was given to all pupils, and they were required to learn the ten major divisions. In addition, students were asked to become sufficiently familiar with such popular topics as the Vietnam War, drugs, the occult, and the environment to be able to find these subjects in the subdivisions.

Background information was provided on the various types of collections in the library and their identifying symbols. Handouts on basic library terminology were distributed throughout both semesters. These papers were always filed in the looseleaf textbooks, and the students were quizzed on the vocabulary sheets and classification areas. The problem of bringing late comers or slow students up to date was partly overcome by having the other assistants do the training and then rechecking their efforts when time was available. Moreover, with library assistance now recognized as a full-year course with a unit of credit, new assistants are not added in the second semester. A draw-back of this policy is the possible loss of students who drop out and thus deplete the staff with no prospect of replacements.

#### **Card Catalog**

After campaigning before the budget committee at regular intervals for the card catalog to be

automated, the staff decided that, in the interim, the student assistants would pull cards for the backlog of weeded volumes, but not file cards for new books. (Volunteers were available to do above-the-rod filing of new acquisitions.) Each student was given a quota of five cards each week, increasing in complexity, whose sets were to be pulled during periods of relative calm. These sets were then given to a librarian to check, and the students were graded on the accurate completion of the assignment. The staff breathed a collective sigh of relief at this considerable accomplishment, and the project gave the students an intimate and practical knowledge of the workings of the card catalog. (In fact, one student was heard to mutter that he learned more about it than he ever wanted to know!)

#### **Audiovisual Instruction**

Each assistant received reading material with schematic operational diagrams on the various types of audiovisual equipment and learned to operate each one. The assistants were required to pass an operations test on all items and to understand the rationale for selecting appropriate equipment for productions purposes. Samples of the forms used in scheduling films through media services, checking out hardware to the staff, and procedures for repairing equipment and making

*"Since 1971"*

## **BROADFOOT'S**

*North Carolina Book Sellers Helping North Carolina Librarians*

### **Broadfoot's of Wendell**

**6624 Robertson Pond Rd. • Wendell, NC 27591 • (919) 365-6963**

The largest selection of North Carolina books anywhere

Free Catalog Cards • Same Day Shipment

*Catalog on request*

### **BROADFOOT PUBLISHING COMPANY**

**Route 4, Box 508-C • Wilmington, NC 28405 • (919) 686-4379**

Publishers of historical and genealogical reference sets.

Now reprinting North Carolina Troops — Volumes I-VII

*Catalog on request*



lamp substitutions were also added to the textbook.

Several of the school's classrooms had been wired to receive programs over the "head-in" system originating in the library control room. This enabled teachers to turn on the monitors in their rooms and receive programs over three different viewing channels. The library assistant serving AV duty was expected to check the scheduling calendar for these broadcasts, start and stop the videotapes, record clock times, and rewind for the next showing.

It was obvious that not all the assistants would be proficient in every area, particularly in the use of audiovisual equipment. So, while every student was taught the basics — operating the hardware, working with the head-in system, and changing copier paper — only one student in each period specialized in videotaping when the need arose. On a few occasions assistants were released from other classes to videotape an important school event. This was done with the permission of the teacher and the understanding that the work would be made up during a library period. Since videotaping was often a public relations undertaking for the media center, it was worthwhile to provide the service.

Similarly, past accidents with the laminator resulted in a policy granting only one student permission to laminate. This was done each day during one period and proved highly successful in avoiding costly mistakes, achieving excellent results, and saving energy. The student responsible also enjoyed his well-deserved reputation as an expert.

## Academics

Independent exercises in research skills once again freed the librarian's hands and allowed the students to study various reference sources. A bibliographic instruction project citing current sources of information on social and controversial issues was used to teach the research unit. At that time, the unit prepared by Wake County was not yet available and the BI project was prepared by a staff member. Now, however, readings, exercises, and tests on other reference tools such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, yearbooks, atlases, indexes, biographical sources, and literature-related materials are included in the media skill sourcebook.

Each week handouts on *Newsbank*, *Reader's Guide*, *Facts on File*, *Editorial Research Reports*, and *Opposing Viewpoints* were distributed with a demonstration of usage. Worksheets examining popular and relevant topics such as rock music, teenage pregnancy and abortion, drugs and alco-

hol abuse, sports, capital punishment, poverty and the homeless, pollution, and animal rights were given to the assistants to be completed by a certain time. In this manner students were able to learn about these materials at their own pace. The exercises benefited the individual assistant and enabled him or her to provide the valuable service of directing peers to the correct sources.

## Computer Skills

Teaching the use of the word-processing program to the assistants was probably the most complicated endeavor, in that it required the presence of the students in the computer lab rather than at their library posts. This was ultimately accomplished by arranging this activity when classes were not scheduled to come in to the library. At no time was it ever necessary to cancel scheduling to accommodate the teaching of the assistants. If the need for free time was absolutely critical, alternate periods on alternate days could have been blocked out well in advance in the class sign-up book.

A major factor was the *PFS: Write* program itself, which is relatively easy to understand, and the step-by-step lesson plans developed by a staff member to take the students through the various editing functions. Once the initial operational procedures were explained, the students continued on their own through the exercises and were responsible for three different writing assignments, ending with an original composition, "My Life as a Library Assistant."

Since English teachers at Broughton plan to introduce this writing program to all of their classes, it may not be necessary for the library staff to teach word processing in the future. Library assistants may need only to demonstrate their competency in this area. They will have an opportunity to explore other computer programs as well. At present, the entire audiovisual inventory is stored on forms designed to use the data management software *PFS: File*, and it is hoped that the assistants can be assigned the task of keeping these records up-to-date. Moreover, teaching the students use of the *Overdue Writer* circulation software would also be an asset to the library program and free the librarian from clerical chores.

DIALOG, with "Classmate" software, was introduced in the spring and opened new vistas to the study of media skills. While demonstrating the potential of this system to the graduating seniors through their English classes, the library assistants were also shown the process of accessing the data bases and the search commands. Because

of the cost involved, plans dictate that only the librarians will conduct the actual searches, but the possibility exists for the student assistants to aid the research student in developing key words used in search strategies and suggesting appropriate data bases.

It became painfully obvious that many high school students have more computer experience and are more technically proficient than are many teachers and librarians. The staff realized a future goal could be to encourage the students' interest and expertise in this area. Through the use of bulletin board exchanges, such as *FrEd Mail*, the assistants might interact with students in other school systems and develop ideas and projects to improve their service and effectiveness to the media center.

### Long-Term Projects

The practice of assigning homework on a regular basis was never undertaken during the past year, but it remains a possibility. A more viable alternative, however, would be to plan long-range independent projects such as the orientation videotape or telecommunications exchange mentioned earlier. Other ideas include preparing and videotaping book talks or videos showing other students using the various reference sources, designing exhibits and displays, and compiling bibliographies on various subjects in the curriculum. Creative students might wish to design recruitment posters and a pamphlet advertising the media center, its resources and hours of operation for new students. Designing flow charts showing various library procedures would be another worthwhile undertaking. Again, the *Library Media Studies* source book has numerous ideas and suggestions for independent projects that would benefit the library and the student.

### Exams and Grades

Twenty percent of the students' grades were based on the results of their final exam. The largest portion of the grade was derived from a category defined as performance, comprised of daily participation in job assignments, worksheets, projects, card pulling, and quizzes. Another portion reflected shelving assignments which were checked at announced and unannounced intervals.

Exams were constructed as combinations of true-false, multiple choice and matching, and a choice of essay questions. Critical thinking/problem solving situations involving procedures, skills, and issues were addressed as in the following

examples: "Mrs. Jones is having trouble with her VCR. She pushes PLAY and nothing happens. What are some possible solutions?" "An overdue book is left on the counter, and the student has walked away. What procedure do you follow to check in the book?" "A student is doing her research paper on acid rain and asks for your help. Under what headings do you tell her to look? Name four possible reference sources." "Coach Smith is in a hurry and asks you to show a video of a wrestling match which he taped from the TV a month ago over the head-in system. What would you do?"

### Rewards and Awards

During National Library Week, photographs of the assistants were taken, autographed, and displayed as "Stars of the Library" in keeping with the 1990 theme. Copies of the pictures were then given to them with a note of appreciation at the end of the year. Occasional celebrations arranged around various holidays also had their place as morale builders — food always seems to be the most effective thank you for teenagers. A thesaurus or a dictionary presented to the graduating seniors was also an appropriate and appreciated gift. Most importantly, to raise the status of the Media Skills Course and recognize students' efforts before their peers, certificates were presented to two outstanding library assistants at a school-wide awards assembly.

Students were regularly asked for their input in improving the course and making their positions more meaningful. Some of their responses proved quite helpful, and the discussion process demonstrated their importance to the media program and to their identity as part of a team effort serving the school.

The opportunity that this course offers to develop research skills and to study the science of information retrieval can enrich the student assistant's education beyond the often mundane clerical and procedural activities expected of them. Yet, while these very chores are essential to the library program, this experience has shown that it is possible to balance the training with academic skills to the benefit of the student, the library, and the school. For this reason, the course should prove a valuable asset to any secondary school curriculum and to the students who can say, "We are library assistants" and truly be proud of their accomplishments.

### References

1. Dale Williams and Marietta Franklin. *Library Media Studies* (Raleigh: Wake County Public Schools, 1989), ii.

Persons wishing to obtain a copy of the text should address their inquiries to Jean Johnson, Media Services, Wake County Public Schools, 3600 Wake Forest Road, Raleigh, NC 27609.



# TAB BOOKS

Current and Backlist  
Titles Available

**40% DISCOUNT**  
No Minimum Order

## CURRENT EDITIONS

858 Manor St.  
P. O. Box 4031  
Lancaster, PA 17604  
F. James Dantro  
Sales Representative

Tel Order 1-800-729-0620  
Fax Order 1-800-487-2278



Venders and media coordinators alike enjoyed this year's North Carolina Association of School Librarians' Biennial Conference in High Point, September 27-28.