

Library Use Instruction: Curricular Support or Curricular Integration?

Those who work in libraries which serve educational institutions know that their mission is to support the curriculum. They strive to make an appropriate body of information in all formats readily available to those whose primary activity is, or is supposed to be, learning. In dark hours, it is hard to forget the observation that education is the one business in which the customer demands the least for his money. Our professional *credo* reflects a commitment to the opposite possibility, and we live amidst manifestations of both views. We actively promote the use of library resources because we see that activity as a vital part of the educational process. The job always seems to be a lot harder than it should be.

Go to any conference on bibliographic instruction (a specific form of library resource use enhancement) and note the earnest intensity of all participants. Listen first to the speakers, triumphant after years of effort and disappointment, and then to those who came to hear them: the beginners, the slightly experienced, the nearly burned out—all convinced their work in helping students learn to use library resources is important, and all seeking ways to diminish their own frustration in doing that work effectively. We care; we believe; we struggle.

Whether or not we have formally trained for it, we are trying to teach. And it is very difficult to build ourselves into a curriculum when academic tradition has never seen or made us to be the vital element we think we ought to be. What is the curriculum? Within the wide scope of academic freedom, it is whatever the teaching faculty is doing in a professional context. Our success in supporting (or affecting or joining) the curriculum depends largely upon our powers of persuasion, hopefully rooted in an increasing personal knowledge and competence. How do we become, and become recognized as, the teachers we want to be?

We have something very important in common with the students we hope to help: we are trying to do something new and complex and we want very much to succeed. To whom do we turn? For the most part, we turn to one another, in print and in person. The literature is filled with our philosophies and recommendations, our accounts of successes. Through ACRL we have a set of guidelines which ought to help any attentive program planner avoid disaster. But diverse curricula require diverse programs, and we frequently madden one another with solutions to unique problems. The plain fact is *we are teaching ourselves*. We are living out the ideal of self education—experience enhanced by reading and listening—that lies at the heart of any program designed to promote the use of library resources. This is how we help ourselves to serve a curriculum.

Ironic, isn't it?

Rose Simon