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## Collaborative Approaches to Deepen Student Learning: Information Literacy, Curriculum Design, and Student Learning Workshops

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# Collaborative Approaches to Deepen Student Learning: Information Literacy, Curriculum Design, and Student Learning Workshops

## **Abstract**

Creating a collaborative environment across student services and instruction is often more challenging than it may first seem. Although effective collaboration is context specific, keeping student learning at the center of the work is a powerful element in successful collaborations. Grossmont College's first year experience program has attempted to create new patterns of behavior among faculty and students in order to foster the kinds of collaboration that can lead to deeper student learning, greater engagement and more success. In particular, an ongoing collaboration between the library, the professional development office, and a campus-wide supplemental student learning calendar serves as a good example of effective educational partnerships that have contributed to increased student success and retention.

## **Introduction and Background**

In 2012, Grossmont College began the pilot of a new program, The Freshman Academy. This program, designed as a first year experience, came out of three years of collaborative work with Kingsborough Community College (KCC) and their Fund for the Improvement of Post Secondary Education (FIPSE) grant, “The Community College Jigsaw: Putting the Pieces Together.” Kingsborough's learning communities program has had great success in promoting student success and retention, and their commitment to collaboration between instruction and student services has also led to their streamlined matriculation process. When KCC invited us to work with them on the FIPSE grant, we agreed. We were a good fit for partnering with Kingsborough in this work because of Grossmont’s long-standing and successful learning community program, Project Success (housed in the English Department), because of our desire to better integrate it into the fabric of the college, and because our similar size (around 20,000 students) and ethnic diversity (both campuses serve highly diverse communities).

The team who worked with Kingsborough was comprised of representatives from across faculty and administration, as well as student services and instruction. Included on the team were our college President, Vice President of Student Services, English faculty/program co-coordinator, general counselor, math faculty, and outreach counselor/program coordinator. Given the intentional purpose of creating a more deeply collaborative approach to student learning, the team was carefully selected to reflect and encourage broad participation.

The project that emerged from our three years of work was a learning community-based, first year experience program that emphasized deep collaboration between instruction and student services—a scalable model that could work (eventually) for all first year students at the college.

As our college began to move forward on the project, there were some key shifts in our thinking. First, even as we began to narrow down the core elements of our program, its focus on collaboration meant that we had to look at student learning more broadly than as something which happens only in a classroom. No longer was learning simply the purview of the classroom instructor. Also, though, the move to collaborate across a broad range of departments, divisions, and campus services required us to think carefully about how, exactly, to define the common ground in our efforts. Our decision to focus on student learning as that shared space guided our work. For example, we began to ask new kinds of questions: What were students learning about financial aid? How did this knowledge serve them across their college experience? Was there a way to deepen their financial aid learning in ways that might contribute to greater success?

As the coordinators of the program spoke with faculty and staff across the college, we were looking for a central idea, skill, or ability that might serve as a common learning goal around which we could develop strategic collaborations with great potential to impact student learning and success. This search was also informed by research into current theory and practice in both learning communities specifically and higher education generally. Our answer: Information Literacy. While there is certainly more to the student experience of success and/or struggle than can be accounted for in information literacy alone, it was clear that this skill cut across virtually every part of the campus and every aspect of our students' lives, both on campus and off.

What follows in this paper is an overview of how our Freshman Academy, and the commitment to collaboration and student learning that it is helping to institutionalize on campus, led to new collaborative efforts across areas, services, and initiatives that had previously been pursued independently. Although information literacy is not the only skill around which we have generated collaborations, it was our first focused effort and remains our most robust and important. In addition, we include some of the institutional data we have collected throughout this process, both as a measure of the relative success of these efforts and as a way of offering some insights into the possibilities for data collection in other efforts readers may be pursuing.

While much has been written in recent years about the importance of a cohesive, intentional and targeted approach to student learning and success in higher education, it is often quite difficult to begin to imagine—or reimagine—the myriad structures of a college and to rebuild the infrastructure necessary to smoothly facilitate new strategies, interventions, and even relationships that are necessary to a truly integrated approach to improving student learning. Also, in any educational bureaucracy, relationships are complex and multifaceted. Operational habits, both institutional and individual, run deep, and changing them can be met with resistance on many fronts. The conversation around student learning is quite clear on the value of developing strategies for working integratively, by making connections between, among and across seemingly disparate areas. The Association of American Colleges & Universities and Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2004) statement explaining the importance of integrative learning calls it “one of the most important goals and challenges of higher education.” This imperative, to develop sustained integrative habits, belongs to the institutions of higher education as much as it does to our students. The focus on deeper learning rather than on surface learning is a global shift, and campuses are starting to explore a variety of options to encourage this type of learning (Lardner & Malnarich, 2008). If we are to teach deep, integrative habits of mind, we must also model them in the structures and approaches we bring to delivering them.

By nature, all collaborations are specific, involving discrete areas of common ground, and must, therefore, be created uniquely to meet particular needs within particular contexts. Still, there are some general insights about collaboration that can help frame the work. However, in order to refine collaboration skills and to assess success, one must define collaboration. Does collaboration mean an increased number of meetings between academic affairs and student services, or is more than communication expected? Since the context of the collaboration varies, assessment of successful collaborations also becomes a complex task (Gulley & Mullendore, 2014; Jackson & Ebbers, 1999). Certainly, our focus on student learning helped to provide a guideline for understanding and assessing such work. Did we have reason to believe that a potential new collaboration might deepen student learning? Could the result of a new partnership be measured in terms of student learning?

One of the early instances of the development of productive new partnerships—between classroom instruction, the Library, professional development, and our Supplemental Learning Workshop Calendar for students—provides some useful insight into our strategies for developing new partnerships in an attempt to promote an integrative environment for students directly and for the institution collectively.

### **A Note on Student Learning and Information Literacy as an Essential Skill**

Our search to become more skilled as colleagues in implementing high-impact collaborative projects was driven by a primary focus on student learning. Many of the current academic models in higher education focus on student success, defined as a passing grade (“C” or better) in any given course. By extension, success or failure in this context is understood to be a direct reflection of student learning and a reliable predictor of students’ success in subsequent semesters. Our contention, along with others (Weissman et al., 2009; Lardner & Malnarich, 2008), is that although student learning and student success are deeply related fields, they are also distinct in important ways that require separate attention.

It has come to have the ring of certain truth that, if we can get our students to succeed in their courses (defined as achieving a “C” or better), then they are learning well and will be successful throughout their college experience. In this model, the assumption that single course completion is a reliable indicator of successful learning misses an opportunity to consider student learning along an academic pathway, which requires increasing skill, ability, and critical thinking ability as well as a growing capacity to apply these to new problems and questions in future (and often more challenging) courses. Thus, successful completion of specific course content might not indicate the degree of learning required to translate the experience to future success. Indeed, we see that course completion

with a “C” or higher, which is commonly assumed to be a reliable measure of overall student learning, does not always (or even reliably) translate into semester to semester student success and persistence. Finally, recent studies have begun to put pressure on the notion that simply acquiring course-specific content will lead to long-term persistence and future course success, pointing to a range of factors outside of course-specific learning that affect student success (finances, affective needs, resource awareness) (Levitz, Noel & Richter, 1999; Comings, 2007).

As we have suggested, information literacy was chosen for the initial series because it is a core skill across the student experience and is deeply connected to student learning and success. In fact, it is one of the key skills identified in Grossmont’s General Education/Institutional Student Learning Outcomes (GE/ISLOs), the core competencies that the college would like our students to gain during their time at Grossmont College.

The importance of developing faculty-librarian collaborations is well established in the literature as well as in professional guidelines. *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (Association of College & Research Libraries [ACRL], 2000) and *Standards for Proficiencies for Instruction Librarians and Coordinators* (ACRL, 2008) both emphasize the necessity of librarian/faculty collaborations, encouraging librarians to “rely upon collaboration with the disciplinary faculty” and to encourage “more effective collaboration with classroom faculty” (ACRL, 2014, p. 10-14). Faculty-librarian collaborations help ensure that the students’ needs are being met and that the faculty and librarians are on the same page as far as goals for instruction.

There are state, national, and international efforts to promote information literacy, recognizing it as a “life skill for the digital age” (State of Oregon, 2012; White House, 2009). A number of associations and accrediting bodies have made information literacy one of their core intellectual skills. The Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) strategic plan for 2013-2017 includes the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) program as one of its four broad goals. The LEAP program includes four essential learning outcomes, and within one of those, Intellectual and Practical Skills, information literacy is listed as one of the key skills (AAC&U). All of the California State University campuses have adopted the AAC&U LEAP Outcomes. Currently, the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges is exploring the adoption of the LEAP outcomes as “model standards for general education or institutional learning outcomes” (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 2013). The skill of information literacy, sometimes called information competency, is also receiving increased attention in higher education because accrediting bodies, including Western Association of Schools and College (WASC) or Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC) require that colleges and universities demonstrate student competency in this area. WASC (2014)

recognizes information literacy as a core competency, stating at its retreat on Core Competencies that “Critical thinking and information literacy stand beside oral and written communication skills as fundamental proficiencies required for academic, professional, and personal success.” It is a key area of cultural competency, and the data show that students are underprepared, and college libraries face an uphill battle.

De Rosa, Cantrell, Hawk & Wilson’s (2010) report for the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) states that college students overwhelmingly (83%) begin their information searches using search engines and that approximately 40% of students indicate they have never used the library website at all. However, of those students who reported using their library website, 99% reported success in finding what they needed (p. 54-60). Not surprisingly, according to Head (2013), Google was the research tool of choice for freshmen students (88%), and even college sophomores, juniors and seniors (87%) (p.25). As Head notes, college students reported using library databases (83%) for research—as long as they were exposed to these resources (p.25).

In a study at the University of Minnesota, Soria, Fransen and Nackerud (2013) provided evidence that “first-year students who used the library at least once in the fall semester had higher grade point averages compared to their peers who did not use the library at all during their first semester” (p. 149). Further, first-year students who used the library at least once during their first semester had higher retention from their fall to spring semester.

We know that many courses across the disciplines require students to write a research paper. Yet first-year students using a college library for their first research paper described finding sources as “nerve wracking,” “foreign,” “intimidating,” and “terrifying” (Head, 2013, p. 12). A study suggests that library orientation sessions decrease library anxiety in entering freshmen. The findings of this article support the notion that the library should be included in first-year programming. In one study, information literacy training sessions were found to have a “pronounced effect” on reducing library anxiety among undergraduates (Platt & Platt, 2013).

Most of Grossmont College’s General Education courses require a research paper, with information literacy written into course outlines for the purpose of “creating sound argumentative claims supported by references to authority and research” (MixedMessages, 2005). In many of these courses, students do not always have the information literacy skills needed to be successful in finding, evaluating, managing, and using information in their research papers. In some cases, faculty may not be aware of the wide range of information literacy skills that students will need to succeed on their research projects.

Librarians typically teach “a single session within a professor’s class” (Nalani Meulemans, 2013, p. 81), making it necessary within that short period of

time to meet the needs of the professor's writing assignment. A "one shot" cannot cover the entire research process. Though librarians often suggest that instructors break the large research paper into smaller components (e.g., outline, annotated bibliography, rough draft, etc.) so that students can focus on these information literacy skills and then put the components together at the end (Fosnacht, 2014, p. 491), there had been little professional development work at Grossmont to guide faculty through thinking about the application of these ideas to their own disciplines.

In addition, what was apparent as we examined the state of the relationship between the library and instructional faculty was that the models we were using placed a great deal of emphasis on ways in which the library could assist instructional faculty in the achievement of their course outcomes. Additionally, the assistance was primarily product based. For example, students were given enough information to be able to find three sources required for a research paper. The result was that the library offered a quick and practical overview on how to complete the research requirement in a particular course, but students did not necessarily come away with a substantially deeper understanding of research as a concept or skill. They were given very little in the way of information literacy instruction that might help them succeed on subsequent and likely more complex assignments. In other words, while the collaborations were designed to have an impact on student success defined as course completion with a "C" or higher, it was not at all clear that student *learning* was being addressed in a full and/or deep way. This was particularly troubling, given that the library is responsible, in part, for helping students across the entire campus to develop information literacy skills that could be applied throughout their college careers and beyond.

In essence, the focus on student *success* led to a collaborative model that served to help students complete and pass courses but missed an opportunity to deepen student learning in ways that might translate to greater facility, confidence, investment, and, ultimately, persistence. We decided to work towards a more genuine collaboration in order to deepen students' information literacy skills *and* improve success by tending, more specifically, to the quality of student learning.

### **Curriculum Mini-Series and Information Literacy**

To create a collaborative model that encouraged deeper student learning, we focused initially on faculty. On most college campuses, libraries do not have enough staff to directly teach information literacy skills to all students on campus. It becomes necessary, therefore, to "teach the faculty to teach information literacy" (Smith & Mundt, 1997). Rather than offering the traditional single workshop model for professional development, the series we developed involved multiple sessions in which faculty could learn about a new topic and then design



and revise curriculum to use in their own classes. While information literacy was the first Curriculum Mini-Series offered at Grossmont, the series was not designed specifically for the information literacy project. The impetus for this series came from Grossmont College's First Year Experience Program, The Freshman Academy. This program, which involves linking multiple courses together with a common cohort of students and shared assignments, required that faculty co-design curriculum across disciplines. The program coordinators, aware that this required faculty to stretch in new directions, created the Curriculum Mini-Series in order to provide a paid professional development opportunity for faculty. Their notion was to give a different theme to each series (one per semester), so that participating faculty had the opportunity to design assignments around shared high-impact skills and practices. Given the broad inter-disciplinary nature of the project, it was designed, from the outset, to be available to all faculty, whether working in teams or independently.

While participation was to be open to anyone, stipends for participating were based only on submission of finished curriculum. These assignments were to be collected and made available as models for faculty across campus through a link from the Grossmont College library. This way, participating faculty would not only be receiving professional development but also would be participating in the dissemination and sharing of curriculum with other faculty, thus extending the reach of the professional development effort and promoting collaboration and sharing more broadly on campus.

The initial email invitation for the Information Literacy workshops went out to the entire campus faculty. The email specified that, when faculty signed up, they were committing to attending three workshops, spaced two weeks apart, and producing a contextualized lesson plan/activity for their course that incorporated one or more information literacy skills. Participants also agreed to share their lesson plans across campus. In exchange, the faculty received eight professional development hours or a stipend of \$150. Twelve faculty members, from six different disciplines, answered the call.

The librarians hoped to address a number of key obstacles that blocked students' ability to learn about information literacy in a deep way. For example, faculty can overestimate students' information literacy skills, assuming that, since students are "digital natives" (Prensky, 2013), they can easily use technologies and find whatever information they may need. Students may indeed be digital natives, but studies show that students use a limited number of technologies (Margaryan, Littlejohn, & Vogt, 2011) and, further, that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and/or ethnic minority backgrounds may not have access to or use as extensive technologies as other digital natives (Bennett, Maton & Kervin, 2014). Faculty sometimes assume that, if they assign a research paper, they have done all they need to do to meet the requirement to teach their students

information literacy skills. The librarians involved in the Curriculum Mini-Series also wanted faculty to know that they could serve as collaborative partners, helping them help their students more than just once a semester. Moreover, the librarians hoped to open the eyes of the faculty, showing them the wide range of information literacy skills possible. For example, faculty could develop lesson plans requiring students to complete activities designed to help them learn to narrow a topic or to evaluate websites. Teaching students information literacy skills like these can set students up for success, scaffolding skills they will need in order to complete their research papers.

The librarians created a handout and a Libguide to help educate participants about the wide range of information literacy skills and what it means to be information literate (BenVau & Farina-Hess, 2013). The LibGuide also served as a repository for the lesson plans/assignments that the faculty created as part of the workshops. This Information Literacy Libguide is linked from both the Freshman Academy website and Library websites.

In the first workshop, the Curriculum Mini-Series co-coordinator laid the groundwork and described the goals for the workshops. The librarians then made the case for teaching information literacy skills in the classroom and described a range of information literacy skills, using the handout they created listing the ACRL Standards, with the jargon removed. This became a springboard into a discussion about what it means to be information literate. One of the librarians described a sample lesson plan she had created so that faculty could get a feel for the types of activities they would be expected to create as part of the workshops (BenVau, 2013). During the workshop, faculty from a wide variety of departments shared ideas about the types of information literacy skills they wanted to help students develop through the curricula they would be designing. This sharing generated new ideas and facilitated cross-pollination of information literacy skills across departments. The last portion of the workshop allowed time for participants to brainstorm lesson plan ideas, with presenters giving feedback. The workshop was recorded, and the video was posted on the campus website so that all faculty could view it if they wished.

For the second workshop, the faculty brought enough copies of their draft lesson plans for each participant and the presenters. Faculty members took turns presenting their draft lesson plans, with the group then giving input and suggestions for revision.

In the third and final workshop, each faculty member presented the final version of the lesson plan to the group. Afterwards, participants emailed a digital version of the lesson plan to the presenters so that they could upload a copy to the “Activities Repository” page on the Curriculum Mini-Series Information Literacy LibGuide. These lesson plans can be found in their entirety on the LibGuide.

The Curriculum Mini Series also represents an attempt to broaden the sense of community we understand and make use of when we participate in a learning community. Here, faculty collaborated, not with their “linked” partners, but across disciplines and services to better understand their students’ needs and better address their potential as learners and students in their own classes and beyond. As standards for professional development change, new forms of collaboration become essential. Crow (2012) cites the new *Standards for Staff Development*, which includes a focus on collaboration: “Learning community members strive to refine their collaboration, communication, and relationship skills to work within and across both internal and external systems to support student learning. They develop norms of collaboration and relational trust and employ processes and structures that unleash expertise and strengthen capacity to analyze, plan, implement, support, and evaluate their practice” (p. 4). As faculty collaborate across disciplines and areas of expertise, then incorporate information literacy skills into their curriculum, students will be able to practice the skills they will need in order to be successful in their courses and throughout their college career.

In other words, in rethinking and restructuring the nature of the collaborative work, we were seeking to expand the learning opportunities for students by deepening the integrative structures within the institution. Now, students who participate in library workshops can also return to classrooms where faculty are trained and prepared to support the development of information literacy in their coursework. This, we hoped, would address student learning in ways that would ultimately breed greater “success” for our students.

### **Supplemental Learning Workshops: Another Layer of Collaboration**

In addition to training faculty to incorporate information literacy work into their classrooms in discipline-specific ways, we also saw the opportunity to strengthen the library's ability to connect effectively to student needs in their work directly with students. To this end, Grossmont College launched a supplemental learning workshop series for students, The Learning Workshop Calendar, as another element in our project to address student learning within the context of Freshman Academy.

One of our main goals was to create a campus-wide resource for students to increase the number and quality of their learning experiences outside of the classroom in order to further promote student success and learning within classrooms. Simultaneously, we sought to develop the resource in a way that would create and sustain increased collaboration across disciplines and across instruction and student services. While the Curriculum Mini-Series engaged faculty in developing information literacy curricula, the learning workshops encouraged students to expand their understanding of key concepts and resources on campus as a whole. Although proving a causal relationship is difficult, past

research on student success indicates a “positive relationship between the availability of resources per students and college degree attainment” (Goldrick-Rab, 2010, p. 441). Recent findings confirm the connection between awareness of student services and student persistence, and colleges have begun a nationwide push for integrating the two in a cohesive manner (Weissman et al., 2009). Our project was to create a user-friendly method for students to access campus resources. We also sought to create a user-friendly resource for faculty, integrating our campus resources with classroom instruction, thus enabling faculty to more easily connect students with the right resource at the right time.

This goal ties directly to the need for refined collaboration. Our institution was already offering tools for student success in a variety of departments, but communication between student services and academic affairs allowed us to develop more opportunities for students to experience deeper learning. We began by identifying workshops that departments on campus were already presenting regularly and brainstorming new workshops that could potentially benefit the students. Departments already holding workshops included Math, Transfer Center, Nursing, and Career Center, while new workshops were created in English, the Library, Counseling, and Associated Students.

After the workshops were identified and departments were on board, the Learning Workshop Coordinator created a public Google Calendar where the events were added (see figures 1 and 2).

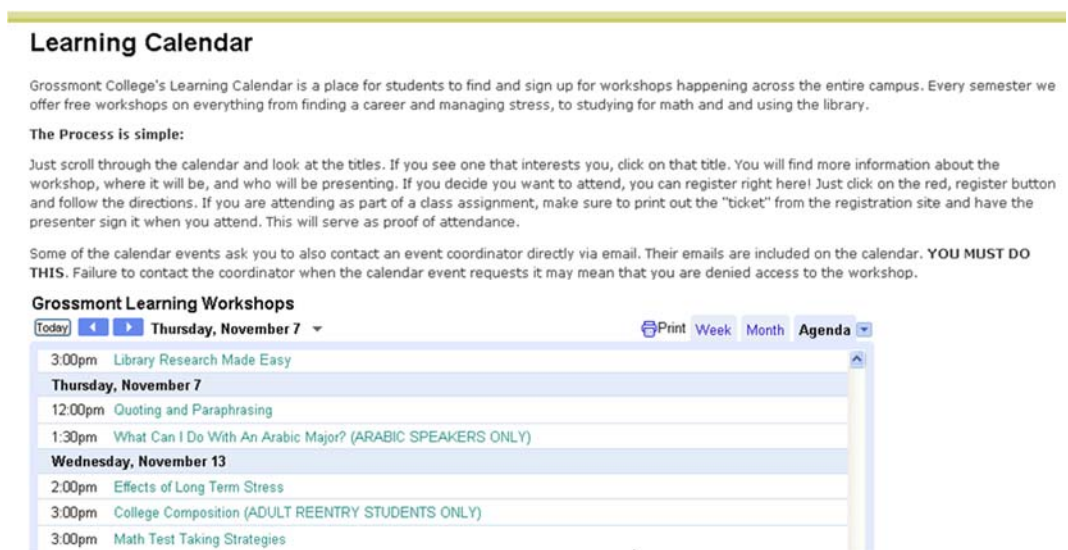


Figure 1 - Learning Calendar Format

**Learning Calendar**

Grossmont College's Learning Calendar is a place for students to find and sign up for workshops happening across the entire campus. Every semester we offer free workshops on everything from finding a career and managing stress, to studying for math and using the library.

**The Process is simple:**  
[DOWNLOAD A STEP BY STEP PDF OF THE REGISTRATION INSTRUCTIONS.](#)

Just scroll through the calendar and look at the titles. If you see one that interests you, click on that title. You will find more information about the workshop, where it will be, and who will be presenting. If you decide you want to attend, you can register right here! Just click on the red, register button and follow the directions. If you are attending as part of a class assignment, make sure to print out the "ticket" from the registration site and have the presenter sign it when you attend. This will serve as proof of attendance.

Some of the calendar events ask you to also contact an event coordinator directly via email. Their emails are included on the calendar. **YOU MUST DO THIS.** Failure to contact the coordinator when the calendar event requests it may mean that you are denied access to the workshop.

**Grossmont Learning Workshops**

Today ← → Tuesday, March 18 ▼ Print Week Month Agenda ▼

**Tuesday, March 18**

- 10:00am [Library Research Made Easy!](#)
- 3:00pm [Effects of Long Term Stress](#)

**Wednesday, March 19**

- 2:00pm [Math Test Taking Strategies](#)

Figure 2 - Learning Calendar Instructions

The link to the calendar is on the Grossmont College Home Page, and the workshops are available to all students (see figure 3).

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**Grossmont's Learning Workshop Series**

Learn about college resources and key success strategies! [Register](#) for any of our free students workshops. [SIGN UP FOR SUCCESS!](#)

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Figure 3 - College Home-Page Announcement

In addition to all of the events being housed in one place, students were able to register for each event through an online ticketing program, Eventbrite. Students use a “Register Now” button on the calendar event that directs them to the Eventbrite page. They input their name, email, and Student ID number in order to register for a ticket to the workshop. We quickly discovered this process is simple and accessible: registration takes place online or by calling the department directly, and students can register for as many events as they desire. On the day of the workshop, presenters have a roster of attendees they can check off, and students who may need proof of attendance for course credit can have the presenter sign their tickets.

The link to the calendar on the Grossmont College Homepage was very beneficial; it allowed students to browse through events that, in the past, they would have had to find on various department websites. In addition, the coordinators spoke at Division meetings during Flex Week in order to encourage instructors to advertise the workshops in their classes. We also created a Flex Week workshop at which instructors could brainstorm specific ways to incorporate any or all of the workshops into their curricula. Specifically for the information literacy workshops, announcements were made on the library Facebook page, library blog, and over the PA right before the event. This collaboration between the Workshop Coordinators and Workshop Presenters created many opportunities for students to learn about the workshops, whereas in the past, the responsibility for advertising these sessions rested solely with the presenter.

### **Workshop Implementation and Assessment**

In order to maximize the value of the workshops as a whole, we again collaborated with professional development to organize information and curriculum design sessions for faculty to strategize ways to integrate the workshops into their courses. Broadly speaking, we sought to foster an environment in which students were able to see a wide range of departments working together for their success and to take advantage of an array of workshop topics.

Faculty incorporated workshops into their classrooms in a variety of ways. Some instructors chose to make workshop attendance mandatory, and students turned in their tickets at the end of the semester for participation or homework grades. The Freshman Academy required that students attend any three workshops of their choosing, and attendance was monitored by one of their instructors. Other instructors outside of Freshman Academy chose to incorporate the workshops through extra credit—students could attend a workshop and write a reflection about how it related to the course or their overall college career. Another effective strategy was to include workshop attendance as a “just in time” remediation strategy. An instructor in the English department created an intervention plan for students who struggled with assignment execution and/or on-time completion. Turning in late work or receiving a non-passing score on any assignment automatically resulted in an office visit during which the student and the instructor worked together to identify the central issue. Whether the issue was grammar, research, citation, time management, stress, financial impediments, or even lack of clear goals, the instructor would direct the student to the relevant workshop and require a follow up reflection on it. This was also associated with a small amount of extra credit, so the work benefited the student both on the current assignment and likely on subsequent ones as well. This intervention plan was

shared with the other English Department faculty at a department meeting and is now being used by multiple instructors.

### **Mutual Enrichment: Information Literacy, Student Workshops, Curriculum Mini-Series**

One of the pilot Learning Workshops, “Library Research Made Easy,” was designed for the Freshman Academy students (though any student who wanted to could attend). The workshop covered search techniques for library databases, including breaking a topic into separate concepts as opposed to using long phrases or questions as students do when searching Google.

Another key point that the Workshop presented is that it is okay to ask for help. Students interviewed in the “Project Information Literacy Research Report” felt that college was all about self-sufficiency and that to ask for help was “simply not done” (Head, 2013, p. 19). Many students feel that they “don’t want to ask for help, or they don’t know how” (Head, 2013). The librarian stressed that librarians are approachable and that help is always available, either in person or through the 24/7 virtual reference service.

The combination of search skills and attention to affective needs represents a shift in the traditional library workshop, a direct result of the library participation in the Curriculum Mini-Series. The library workshop better met students’ learning needs once it was freed from a product-based model and reconceptualized as a collaborative project that recast librarians as presenters and co-learners.

Although the Curriculum Mini-Series and the Learning Workshops are programs aimed at separate groups on campus, the two rely on each other to succeed. We have already discussed the way in which both students and G.E. faculty benefited from this integration of practices across campus. Perhaps most importantly for this article, the work of the Curriculum Mini Series not only created an opportunity for faculty to consider the explicit instruction of information literacy in their courses, it also allowed the instructional librarians to gain a more nuanced understanding of the particular information literacy skills required of students in particular disciplines—and in what contexts those skills are exercised. The result is that during the student workshops the instructional librarians are now better able, based on a student’s discipline, to tailor instruction to individual needs during independent work times in the session. As a result of the collaboration, everyone is enriched.

## **Some Data**

The synergy that has been created as a result of this intentional approach to collaboration has yielded some exciting results. In bringing the library, professional development and curriculum design, the supplemental workshop, and our first year experience program together with a shared focus on student learning, we have restructured our working relationships and begun the process of institutionalizing our new, learning-focused approach to student success.

While the data we have collected is somewhat correlational in nature in the aggregate, it is strongly suggestive of the efficacy of our approach. Although we did not survey students about the workshops directly, we did collect information in a variety of formats from groups who participated in them throughout the semester. First, in the Freshman Academy, where we controlled for the greatest degree of fidelity to the collaborative principles we have outlined in this paper (through multiple pre-semester design and focus meetings, mid-semester progress checks, and faculty feedback surveys), student success and unit completion were substantially improved. Next, student responses to the Washington Center's Online Survey suggest that members of the cohort experienced constructive learning environments. The two data sets are discussed below.

After a pilot semester and one full year of implementation, our first full-year cohort data suggests some significant impact to such an approach. In a comparison report, Freshman Academy students (all of whom were placed into cohorts that included developmental English [English 98]) fared significantly better than their first-year counterparts who also tested into English 98. The success rates for Freshman Academy students across all their courses were 81.7% in Fall and 74.2% in Spring as opposed to 72.0% in Fall and 66.6% in Spring for the comparison group ("Freshman Academy," 2013). They also saw a jump of 1.5 in units completed in their first year, and their course by course success rates were substantially higher than in the comparison group, suggesting that the higher rates of success overall were achieved in spite of a more difficult than average course schedule compared to their comparison group peers. For example, in our Child Development cohort, the success rate was 89.3% compared to 51.9% outside of the program. In Introduction to Psychology, success in the cohort group was 71.7% as compared to 57.9% outside the cohort ("Freshman Academy," 2013).

In addition to the success rate increases, there were also telling results in relation to student learning. In the spring of 2013, the Freshman Academy participated in the Online Survey of Students' Experiences, in Learning Communities, a nationally administered survey designed to probe the nature and quality of student learning, as distinct from student success. A comparison of two cohorts, one whose instructors were able to attend the Curriculum Mini Series and implement their newly created information literacy curriculum sequence and a



second whose instructors neither attended nor implemented, yielded significant differences in student responses in key areas. It is worth noting that both teaching teams participated in professional development activities in which they developed linked, integrative assignments but only one added the additional information literacy work. In response to the survey prompt in the teaching practices section, “Demonstrate how to integrate concepts and skills from different classes in a meaningful way,” students in the implementing cohort responded “often” or “very often” at a rate of 87.6%. In the non-implementing cohort, the response rate was 77.7%. To the prompt, “Assign work and skills from different courses to reach new understanding and/or applications,” students in the implementing cohort responded “often” or “very often” also at a rate of 87.6%. In the non-implementing cohort, that response rate was 81.4% (“Online,” 2013). While the data suggests we are comparing success to success, it also demonstrates what we believe is a meaningful difference in student experience of learning.

### **Lessons and Future Plans**

The goal of both the Curriculum Mini-Series and the Learning Workshops was to cultivate collaborative relationships in order to promote student learning and success in an efficient way, and overall, the programs were successful. We tracked both attendance and course success rates for our first cohorts. Also, we sought feedback from instructors and workshop presenters. By assessing the programs after their first semester, we were able to find some areas where they could be improved.

We quickly found that students were much more engaged in the Learning Workshop presentations when they perceived the need for them. Informally, we heard from students that it was much easier to achieve the goal of developing information literacy skills, or any other set of skills, when students self-identified their interest in working on that area or were directed to specific workshops at a time of specific need. In addition, students noted that “developing a topic” was an area where they wanted extra assistance.

In addition to tracking attendance and course success rates, and in order to gain more systematic feedback from students involved in these programs, we have developed an online pre and post survey, which will be implemented beginning fall 2015.

Through our assessment efforts, we realized that a key area for growth lies in marketing the programs more effectively. To this end, the Curriculum Mini-Series is now being taken over by the Professional Development office on our campus (instead of being organized through the Freshman Academy). This has several advantages. First, most faculty look to the Professional Development office to find new development opportunities. Also, our campus professional development coordinators have just completed a comprehensive needs

assessment, based on both survey and focus group data, and are intending to use the Mini Series as one of the vehicles to help address those needs. Thus, it will be well advertised, centrally located, and targeted to meet needs that have been discovered through careful collection of information.

The link to the Learning Workshops Calendar on the Grossmont College Home Page definitely helped in marketing the workshops, but we plan to widen our outreach to students. We found that the most effective way to advertise was to get instructors excited about linking workshops to what they were doing with students in the classroom—if the instructors were enthusiastic, the students were much more willing to attend the workshops with a positive attitude. Going forward, we intend to engage faculty in thinking about how the workshops can support their instructional goals for their courses. We aim to present the program at as many Division meetings as possible, walking instructors through the registration process from a student’s perspective. We have also created a flyer instructors can give to students, with step-by-step registration instructions.

In addition to marketing, it’s always a concern to make sure that information and resources are easy to find. At this moment, most of the curriculum developed in the Curriculum Mini-Series is stored on the Freshman Academy website, not a page on the main Grossmont College website. Since instructors in Freshman Academy created and led the program, this seemed logical, but we discovered that instructors who were not a part of the Freshman Academy classes were also eager to take part in the Mini-Series. While all faculty can access the curriculum on the Freshman Academy website, we think they would be more likely to access it on the employee intranet.

Though we faced challenges with marketing and ease of access, the work produced in both programs was high quality. In the Curriculum Mini-Series, faculty were eager to create in-depth lesson plans for the students, and they were very willing to collaborate and share their curriculum with others. Furthermore, faculty who volunteered to present the Student Learning Workshops were enthusiastic about making their event a valuable one for students. Both adjunct and full-time faculty ran workshops, creating hands-on experiences for the students in order to keep them engaged.

As the programs continue to grow, our hope is to build on and reinforce healthy collaborative working relationships across campus in order to offer more meaningful learning opportunities for students. Even though many departments on campus have committed to presenting Learning Workshops each semester, we would like to create more workshops for students about financial aid opportunities, on-campus health services, and tips for writing scholarship essays. By creating a variety of workshops, we hope to draw in new student attendees and

widen the circle of faculty and staff who are interested in responding to a range of student needs.

As we move forward with the Curriculum Mini Series, we are expanding the funding to include stipends for design, for implementation, and for completion of a formal self-assessment of the curriculum. Each stage is paid out individually, and faculty are invited, but not required, to participate in the implementation and formal assessment stages. We have increased the stipend total so that each portion is as much as the original. This is paid for out of funds provided as part of our college's annual activity proposal process. This three-stage system of reimbursement is more consistent with our campus-wide "PIE" initiative, which promotes a three-part process of continuous improvement for all college projects—Planning, Implementation, Evaluation.

### **Conclusion**

The work of creating new collaborations and keeping student learning at the center of those efforts is challenging. However, the rewards of these efforts have been tremendous on our campus. Not only are new friendships emerging, but we are also seeing deepening levels of engagement and innovation among faculty and staff who are participating in this work.

Ultimately, though, student learning and success are the most exciting elements of our efforts. As we move forward with the Freshman Academy and the scaling of our programmatic practices, we remain excited and optimistic about the futures of our students.

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