

Award for the Best First-Timer Poster Presentation

Teaching Health Sciences Librarianship with a very large team: breaking the borders of the one instructor model

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Abstract

Eleven practicing academic health librarians at the University of Alberta taught LIS 520: Introduction to Health Sciences Librarianship as a large team. This study evaluated the students' responses to being taught by a large team and the librarians' responses to teaching in a large team. Overall, both groups were positive about the experience. The librarians documented best practices for teaching with a large team.

Key words: teaching-methods; librarians; education, graduate.

Introduction

Late in the summer of 2011, eleven librarians from the John W. Scott Health Sciences Library at the University of Alberta responded to a request from the School of Library and Information studies for an instructor to teach LIS 520: *Introduction to Health Sciences Librarianship*. Because none of the librarians, individually, was able to free up sufficient time to draft a curriculum and teach the entire course, they agreed to teach as a large team. All are co-workers, with a minimum of two years experience working with the team. All are professional colleagues, each holding a graduate degree in librarianship and/or information science. All are experienced teachers, with experience ranging from several who had taught or co-taught post-secondary level courses, to those who had extensive experience teaching information literacy sessions to students and Faculty.

A review of the literature revealed that while there were many articles about "team teaching", most referred to two or three people teaching a course. Two articles, George and Davis-Wiley(1) and Cruz and Zaragoza(2) offered best practices for two and three member teaching teams, respectively. No articles addressed teaching with large teams in health sciences librarianship education. Other articles did describe

courses organized by one instructor who invited multiple guest lecturers. Large team teaching differs from this method in that all team members are involved in and responsible for the delivery of the course from beginning to end. Unlike a guest lecturer, who comes to the class, delivers a session and then leaves, members of a large team have ongoing roles through the life of the course. To a greater or lesser extent, they may take part in curriculum development and course continuity, communicate with each other about the progress of the course, perform multiple roles in the course and may take part in student evaluation and course evaluation.

Because of the paucity of literature on teaching with large teams, the team decided to formally study the project sought and received research ethics approval to be able to report on the project and on best practices that would arise from the experience.

Approach to the course

LIS 520 was scheduled for thirteen weeks, in the fall term of 2011 with classes taught in a three-hour block once per week. Recognizing that teaching with such a large team has inherent challenges, one librarian agreed to be responsible for administrative coordination for the course, and another for curriculum coordination. Several of the librarians drafted an initial curriculum and the

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team met in mid-August to finalize the course content. Instructors volunteered individually, or in pairs, to teach classes based on their disciplinary strengths or interests. Instructors worked together to incorporate strong active learning components in the course. These included hands-on database searching, discussion, in-class small group critical appraisal of an article, a tour of the health sciences special collection and games. The course also required several marked out-of-class assignments. Among these were class presentations which were observed and graded by some of the librarians and a documented systematic review search, which required students to work directly with individual librarians acting as “principal investigators”. Marks from these assignments contributed to the final grade.

Issues highlighted by the teaching team

The team met before the beginning of the course to discuss issues that might arise from the large team instructional format. Communication, both among instructors and between instructors and students, was identified as a primary concern. Other areas of concern included overlaps or gaps in content and consistency and fairness in the assignment of grades. To ensure strong communication among the instructors, who are rarely have the luxury of meeting as a whole group, an intranet space was created to house both teaching materials and materials related to the research project. This allowed instructors to review what had been taught in previous classes and to re-use PowerPoint slides to reinforce previously-taught concepts. In addition, instructors were encouraged to communicate directly among themselves, particularly in areas of overlap among their classes.

To ensure strong communication between the teaching team and the students, several strategies were put in place. First, the team agreed that the librarian coordinating administrative aspects of the course should be present at most classes to introduce the other librarians and would be the main conduit through which general information from all the instructors would flow to the class. Second, the course coordinator also ensured that the course web-page hosted by the School of Library and Information Studies was updated with the new course outline, course timetable, list of assignments and readings submitted by each of the instructors. Third, the course coordinator also maintained an e-mail list for broadcasting messages to the whole class. Students were encouraged to e-mail the course coordinator regarding any concerns. A separate Library web-page was created to provide additional information and course materials.

While all librarians involved in the course were experienced with instruction, they had not all been involved previously in grading assignments. To ensure consistency, objectivity, and fairness in the assignment of grades, each assignment was graded by two librarians. In advance of the assignment deadline, the two librarians collaborated to develop a grading rubric that was then used to evaluate the students’ work. The librarians assessed the students individually before getting together to discuss the evaluations and to assign grades. The course coordinator, having attended most of the classes was best able to assess the students’ levels of engagement with the course and therefore assigned the participation grade by herself. The course coordinator tabulated the final results and submitted the students’ letter grades to the School of Library and Information Studies.

Evaluation of LIS 520

Student surveys

Both students and librarians were asked to evaluate the course. Early in the term, the team met (including some members by teleconference), to develop two evaluative surveys for administration to the students: a mid-point evaluation and an end-of-course survey. These surveys were delivered in addition to the mandatory evaluation administered by the University.

The anonymous survey questionnaires, with cover letters describing the research project were given to the students at the end of the class in Week 8 and on the final day of classes. The students were assured both in the cover letters and verbally that the surveys were not a part of the course activities, that completing them was voluntary and that choosing to complete them or not complete them would have no impact on their grades in the course. The survey forms were placed in an envelope and returned to the course coordinator.

Instructors’ feedback

A final instructors’ meeting was held during which instructors responded verbally in a round-robin style to a series of printed questions. Two instructors attended by teleconference. Two others who could not attend were given the questions and had the option of responding asynchronously. One librarian recorded and collated the responses into themes.

Results

Student evaluations

The students found this course to be a very positive experience. In all areas queried they found the instruction by the large team to be “about the same” or better than

being taught by one instructor or a team of one to three instructors (Table 1). The greatest benefits for the students were that they were exposed to many practicing health librarians through the course and were able to benefit from the rich knowledge base that the team brought to the course (Table 2). While the students identified potential drawbacks to being taught by a large team, only one identified a specific instance related to instructor knowledge of what had been taught previously (Table 3).

Areas of Instructor Performance	Better	About the same
Mastery of Material Presented	4	3
Maintaining Student Interest in Class	5	2
Range of Learning Activity Types	4	3
Communication with Students	3	4

Table 1. Student ratings of large team instructor performance when compared previous experience in other courses having 3 or fewer instructors.

Student Feedback: Positive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “learn from a broad knowledge base” • “variety of voices/input” • “teaching of topics by subject experts” • “best class I have taken” • Also liked <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Practical hands-on exercises (some in class and assignments which helped students learn ○ small class size (7)

Table 2. Student commentary on the things that they liked best about the course as taught by the large team.

Student Feedback: Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “a danger of sections being disconnected” • “not when it is well-taught like this class was” • “if properly coordinated, no” • “differences in the amount of material presented” • “instructors in one session assumed familiarity (with material that had not previously been taught)”

Table 3. Student commentary on whether or not they saw drawbacks to being taught by a large team.

References

1. George, MA, Davis-Wiley P. Team Teaching a Graduate Course. Coll Teach. [Internet]. 2000, Spring [cited 22 May, 2012] Vol. 48, Issue 2, p. 75-81. Available from JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27558993>
2. Cruz BC, Zaragoza N. Team teaching in teacher education: Intra-college partnerships. Teacher Education Quarterly. 1998 Spr;25(2):53-62.

Instructor evaluations

For the librarians, the primary benefits were the opportunity to undertake graduate level instruction without having to take responsibility for the entire course and the opportunity to learn both in enhanced subject knowledge and in teaching techniques. All of the librarians valued being able to teach in their own field (Table 4). The only drawbacks identified by the librarians were not getting to know the students as well as an individual instructor might and the amount of time require for marking assignments (Table 5).

Instructor Feedback: Positive
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “not something that I would have done on my own” • “more creative instruction because of different teaching styles and knowledge” • “liked working with a partner” • “liked teaching within my own profession” • “liked having a coordinator to maintain quality and consistency”

Table 4. Instructor commentary on the things that they liked most about teaching in a large team environment.

Instructor Feedback: Downsides and Surprises
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “don’t get to know the students like you would if you were the only instructor” • “surprised by the amount of time and labour required for marking”

Table 5. Instructor commentary about the things that they liked least about teaching in a large team environment.

Conclusion

Both the students and the librarians found this course to be a very positive experience. All of the librarians believe that there is value in team teaching the course again and all would volunteer to be part of the teaching team again. Both librarians and students were concerned about consistency in grading. The greatest benefits for the students were that they were exposed to many practicing health librarians through the course and were able to benefit from the rich knowledge base that the team brought to the course. For the librarians the primary benefits were the opportunity to undertake graduate level instruction without having to take responsibility for the entire course and the opportunity to learn both in enhanced subject knowledge and in teaching techniques. The librarians were able to identify best practices for teaching with a large team (Appendix A).

Appendix A: Best practices for teaching with a large team

1. Ensure that one or more team members take on the role of coordinating team efforts, so that there is consistency and efficiency across the course.
2. Make one person the primary communications point for the students.
3. In advance, establish within the team how grading will be done. Ensure that the students know how consistency and fairness will be maintained in the assignment of grades.
4. Ensure that members of the teaching team have the opportunity to get to know each other. If team members do not have prior experience with each other, there may need to be some team building exercises in advance of the course.
5. Ensure that multiple methods of communication are encouraged and used within the team.
6. Ensure that all members of the team have the opportunity to contribute to the development of the curriculum, including the assignments, so that all instructors have a broad understanding of the course and the workload required of the students.
7. Come to consensus on who will teach what, allowing team members to choose to teach either in their areas of expertise, or perhaps with another instructor in an area in which they would like to develop expertise.
8. Involve the instructors to the level that they can be/want to be involved. One of the benefits of a large team is that people can contribute more or less, depending upon their skills, knowledge, abilities and available time.
9. Build in multiple points of contact between the students and the various instructors, so that the students have the opportunity to get to know more of the instructors.
10. Ensure that all instructors place their teaching materials into a repository that is accessible by all, so that instructors can see what the students have already covered.
11. Allow the instructors to introduce their own teaching methods and styles to take advantage of the breadth of teaching skill that the team members bring to the course.
12. Incorporate a de-briefing session so that instructors can reflect upon the team's work and offer suggestions for improvement.
13. Have fun and find ways for the students to have fun.

Teaching Health Librarianship with a Very Large Team: Breaking the Borders of the One-Instructor Model

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Background

Teaching with a very large team differs from courses in which an instructor invites many guest speakers in that all team members are involved in the course from beginning to end, taking various roles including curriculum development, coordination, teaching, setting assignments, interacting with students, marking assignments and evaluating the course.

While there are articles about small team teaching in the literature (Cruz and Zaragoza, George and Davis-Wiley), there are no examples of courses in health sciences librarianship taught by very large teams.

Goal

To evaluate the delivery of a one-semester graduate level course in Health Librarianship (LIS 520), as taught a team of eleven co-instructors, and to create best practices for teaching with very large teams in health sciences librarianship.

Methods

- LIS 520 was taught from September to December 2011.
- Eleven academic health librarians jointly created the curriculum and taught the course.
- Students completed midpoints and final surveys with both Likert scale questions and open-ended questions.
- Librarians responded to an evaluation survey in print or verbally.
- Two librarians compiled survey results.
- All librarians contributed to the creation of the best practices document.

Results – Evaluative

Student Evaluations

Both the students and the librarians found this course to be a very positive experience. The greatest benefits for the students were that they were exposed to many practicing health librarians through the course and were able to benefit from the rich knowledge base that the team brought to the course.

Results – Evaluative Continued

	Before	After the course
Meaning of Material Presented	4	3
Meaning Student Interest in Class	5	2
Range of Learning Activity Types	4	3
Communication with Students	3	4

Table 1. Student evaluations of the course before and after the course.

Student Commentary: Positive

- "learn from a broad knowledge base"
- "variety of voices/input"
- "feeling of topics by subject experts"
- "best class I have taken"
- Also liked:
Practical hands on exercises (done in class) and assignments which helped students learn (read case file [1])

Table 2. Student commentary on things enjoyed most about the course.

Student Commentary: Drawbacks

- "a larger of sections being disseminated"
- "not when it is well-taught like this class was"
- "if properly coordinated, no"
- "differences in the amount of material presented"
- "instructors in one session assumed familiarity with material that had not previously been taught"

Table 3. Student commentary on things enjoyed least about the course.

Instructor Expectations

For the librarians the primary benefits were the opportunity to undertake graduate level instruction without having to take responsibility for the entire course and the opportunity to learn both in enhanced subject knowledge and in teaching techniques. All of the librarians believe that there is value in team teaching the course again and all would volunteer to do part of the teaching team again.

Instructor Feedback: Positive

- "not something that I would have done on my own"
- "more creative instructor because of different teaching styles and knowledge"
- "liked working with a partner"
- "liked teaching with my own professor"
- "liked having a coordinator to maintain quality and consistency"

Table 4. Instructor commentary on things enjoyed most about the course.

Instructor Feedback: Downsides and Surprises

- "don't get to know the students like you would if you were the only instructor"
- "surprised by the amount of time and labour required for marking"

Table 5. Instructor commentary on things enjoyed least about the course.

Large team teaching does require a team leader or coordinator to ensure smooth communication with academic administration and the students. Students were clearly concerned about consistency in grading.

Results – Best Practices

- Ensure that one or more team members take on the role of coordinating team efforts, so that there is consistency and efficiency across the course.
- Make one person the primary communications point for the students.
- In advance, establish within the team how grading will be done. Ensure that the students know how consistency and fairness will be maintained in the assignment of grades.
- Ensure that members of the teaching team have the opportunity to get to know each other. In team members do not have prior experience with each other, there may need to be some team building exercises in advance of the course.
- Ensure that multiple methods of communication are encouraged and used within the teaching team.
- Ensure that all members of the team have the opportunity to contribute to the development of the curriculum, including the assignments, so that all instructors have a broad understanding of the course and the workload required of the students.
- Come to consensus on who will teach what, allowing team members to choose to teach either in their areas of expertise, or perhaps with another instructor in an area in which they would like to develop expertise.
- Invite the instructors to the level that they can best be involved. One of the benefits of a large team is that people can contribute more or less, depending upon their skills, knowledge, abilities and available time.
- Build in multiple points of contact between the students and the various instructors, so that the students have the more opportunity to get to know the instructors better.
- Ensure that all instructors place their teaching materials into a repository that is accessible by all, so that instructors can see what the students have already covered.
- Allow the instructors to introduce their own teaching methods and styles to take advantage of the breadth of teaching skillsets the team members bring to the course.
- Incorporate a debriefing session so that instructors can reflect upon the team's work and offer suggestions for improvement.
- Have fun and find ways for the students to have fun.

Conclusions

This study found benefits in teaching health librarianship using a large integrated team of practicing librarians.

- Benefits to students included exposure to a variety of practicing health librarians and their collective broad knowledge base.
- Benefits to librarians included being able to teach at the graduate level without taking on a whole course and being able to learn through teaching with colleagues.

EAHIL EBSCO Scholarships 2012

London – 23 July 2012 – The European Association for Health Information and Libraries (EAHIL) has awarded another six scholarship grants, including two more sponsored by EBSCO, to assist with travel and conference-related expenses in attending the EAHIL 25th Anniversary annual meeting in Brussels, Belgium on 4-6 July 2012.

EBSCO has a long-standing relationship with EAHIL and is a strong supporter of its aims through attendance at its annual conferences, the scholarship programme, and sponsorship of its journal.

The scholarships of up to €500 each were presented to librarians who are still getting established in the profession. This year's recipients are:

Zane	BRUVERE	Latvia
Karin	BYSTRÖM	Sweden
Chiara	CIPOLAT MIS	Italy
Susana	HENRIQUES	Portugal
Rebeca	ISABEL-GOMEZ	Spain
Riina	KUIK	Estonia

The recipients were recognised in front of EAHIL members, following the General Assembly of an EAHIL business meeting. The President of EAHIL, Peter Morgan, together with Hans-Peter Meulekamp, EBSCO Publishing's Regional Sales Manager, Corporate and Biomedical, Benelux and Scandinavia, presented certificates and reimbursed travel and related costs to the two librarians.

The grants supported these health information professionals to attend this year's meeting, which provided an opportunity for health sciences librarians for continuing education, and to present and discuss papers, posters, applied research, and important issues related to health sciences information management.

To be considered for the EAHIL EBSCO award, applicants must be currently employed in a health sciences library and should still be getting established in the profession. Each candidate completed an application form and wrote short essays answering the questions: *Please let us know how attending the EAHIL conference will benefit you?* and *Please formulate what you expect to contribute to EAHIL.* Their applications were considered in confidence and were judged, by the seven members of EAHIL's Board, on the merits of the case submitted by each applicant.