ENGAGING BEYOND THE FIRST COLLEGE YEAR

Exploring the needs of second-year students

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This article makes the case for librarians to engage with second-year students as part of the burgeoning movement in higher education to provide dedicated programming and experiences for second-year students. Grounded in development theories and transition theory, the article describes the special needs characteristic of typical second-year students and how librarians can build on the excellent work in first-year programs to collaborate with campus colleagues to advance information literacy instruction.

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INTRODUCTION

Strengthened by the foundation of quality work to enrich students' first year of higher education, colleges and universities are now turning their attention to their sophomore students. There has been a dramatic rise in the development and implementation of programs and initiatives focusing on second-year students. A survey conducted by the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition in fall of 2005 found that nearly 130 institutions offered some type of program designed specifically for sophomores, a significant increase over the 40 who reported having such programs in a 2000 survey (Pattengale & Schreiner, 2007). In 2012, Maggie Heier of University of Washington's Division of Student Life, wrote a detailed report summarizing the growing movement among their peer institutions. She noted that 83% of University of Washington's peer institutions offered some kind of dedicated programming for second-year students (Heier, 2012, p. 14). This burgeoning movement provides excellent opportunities for academic librarians to continue and enhance the critical library role from the first-year experience movement.

Librarians have a strong history of instruction to incoming students, as described by Cindy Pierard and Kathryn Graves (2002) in their survey of outreach to freshmen courses; instruction has taken many forms from tours to credit courses. The first year of college movement, which gained significant momentum with the creation of the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition in 1986 (http://www.sc.edu/fye/center/history.html), and the increasing complexity of the information environment and the changing role of libraries, inspired a focused attention in libraries on the first year. *The Role of the Library in the First College Year*, published by both the Association of College & Research Libraries and the National Center for the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition in 2007, and the *First-Year Experience and Academic Libraries: A Select, Annotated Bibliography*, compiled by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) First-Year Experience Task Force in 2004, document the excellent work in this area. The annual updating of the bibliography by the ACRL Instruction Section's Teaching Methods Committee attests to its continued growth and relevance.

As librarians do more and more teaching in the first year, they are finding that the ACRL Information Literacy Standards (2000) are complex and difficult for these students to master in their first year. Anne Fields (2001) notes the mixture of both lower level tasks noted in the standards, such as identify and differentiate, and higher level tasks, such as create, analyze, and synthesize. She goes on to note that even the lower level tasks can be problematic for some students in earlier stages of intellectual development. Rebecca Jackson (2007) is more direct, "The information literacy standards may include many competencies that are beyond the cognitive level of the students librarians encounter, especially from classes like freshman composition" (p. 30).

The *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (ACRL, 2014), in draft form at the time of this writing, with

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its expanded definition of information literacy and inclusion of affective as well as cognitive domains, further encourages librarians to become familiar with student development theories and to engage with students beyond the first year.

STUDENT DEVELOPMENT THEORIES

In a frequently cited work, Perry (1970) described nine positions along a continuum of intellectual development of college students. These are generally grouped into three broader categories of dualism, multiplicity, and ending with relativism. Perry notes that most traditionally aged college students begin their college experiences from a position of basic duality in which there is a clear right and wrong and the authority distinguishes among them for students, who simply need to adhere. Students grow throughout their college experience to various levels of multiplicity, the view that there are many answers but seeing them all as valid, and then toward relativism in which opinions must be supported. The highest level of relativism is one in which the student values diversity yet commits to personally articulated values. Many students leave college while still engaged in this development, generally in the later stages of identifying and committing to personal values.

There is much more to the college experience than just intellectual development. In the area of psychosocial development Arthur Chickering's work, revised with Linda Reisser (1993), is frequently cited. They describe seven major dimensions, or vectors, of development that occur during the college years. They are (as summarized by Schaller, 2007):

- *Developing competence* (intellectual, physical, and interpersonal): Competence is developed in all three areas and has an impact on a student's readiness to take risks and to engage with the new environments around them. Often a decline in competence is experienced during a period of personal growth.

- *Managing emotions*: Development in this vector involves awareness of emotions, distinguishing among them, valuing the information that emotions provide, and understanding the consequences of emotional outbursts.

- *Moving through autonomy toward interdependence:* Autonomy is achieved by learning to provide for one's own emotional needs, the ability to carry out activities and solve problems. Autonomy leads to interdependence as individuals build rewarding relationships.

- *Developing mature interpersonal relationships:* Through an increasing openness to diversity and empathy for others, individuals are able to establish deep interpersonal connections that lead to mature relationships.

- *Establishing identity:* Within this vector, one develops a firm sense of self by answering the question, "Who am I?"

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- *Developing purpose:* Answering the question, "Where am I going?" leads to development of personal priorities that include career plans, interests, and relationships.

- *Developing integrity:* Aligning one's behavior and values in order to apply ethical principles to one's life occur in this vector, including the ownership of values based on personal beliefs instead of what one is told to believe.

Chickering and Reisser note in their introduction that their model is based on an optimistic view of human development which assumes that a nurturing and challenging college environment will help students grow in all areas of development. They reinforce that it is critical to focus on more than simply intellectual development and for educators to see college students as whole individuals with gifts of human potential in mind, body, heart and spirit (Chickering & Reisser, 1993, pp. 40-41).

Transition theory is also important in considering the development of college students. Bridges (2004) defines transition as the psychosocial response to life changes, but notes that not all changes result in transition. A person chooses how to adapt to the external change, generally either retreating or transitioning into a new version of self. The college experience is a time of transition for many young people as they move from childhood into adulthood. This transition, as all transitions, is not easy and takes time. Bridges (2004) describes three major phases to transition: endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings. While often prompted by external events, transitions

begin with internal reflection and the disengagement and deconstruction of former definitions of self; Bridges named this the *ending phase*. During the *neutral zone* that follows, there is emptiness or a moratorium from conventional ways into which one explores new definitions of self. "It fact, the neutral zone is a time when the real business of transition takes place. It is a time when an inner reorientation and realignment are occurring" (Bridges, 2004, p. 154). The final transition phase, *beginnings*, is an internal one that leads to external changes. These changes can be as dramatic as whole new identities or as small as a new habit, but they all involve internal re-identification and re-engagement.

FOCUSING ON THE SECOND COLLEGE YEAR

Building on these theories of psychosocial and intellectual development during the college years and built onto the framework of transition theory, Molly Schaller led several studies exploring the developmental challenges facing sophomores specifically; she described her findings in a theoretical framework published in 2010 and summarized here.

Schaller notes that while the entire college experience is a time of transition, or multiple transitions for students, the second year is a particularly critical time for identity development. Margolis (as cited in Schaller, 2010) likened the identity crisis of the sophomore year of college to that found in middle age. He suggested, and Schreiner (2012) confirmed, that second-year students experienced increased academic and interpersonal challenges at the same time institutional support systems decrease.

These things push students toward transition.

The first stage Schaller identifies is *random exploration*. This stage occurs primarily during the first year of college as students explore all that is available to them in their new environment. Often during the summer following the first year students begin to make sense of these experiences as their self-awareness grows and they enter their second year in the next phase, *focused exploration*. Students are more conscientious in this stage as they actively seek insight into relationships, future and self. They are aware that they are in between childhood and adulthood; they begin to question the choices they have made thus far. This is an uncomfortable yet important stage. The longer a student stays here the deeper the exploration; if students leave this stage too quickly, their exploration can be too shallow and leave them vulnerable to external pressures on key upcoming life decisions (Schaller 2005).

It is during sophomore year that many students need to have declared a major and make other significant life decisions. As choices are tested and reflected upon during the focused exploration stage, students move to the third stage of *tentative choices*. This stage occurs generally during the sophomore or junior year. There is still some doubt, self-reflection, and room for later change to these decisions, however, hence the tentative label. The transition completes with the *commitment stage*. This fourth stage is when new beginnings emerge in all three areas: relationships, future, and self. Students have more confidence in the decisions they have made and put forth energy to pursue their goals. This final stage

is where sophomores are headed; most will not reach it during their second year.

LIBRARIANS AND SUPPORT FOR SECOND-YEAR STUDENTS

Research exploring the development of traditionally aged sophomores suggests that this year is a key one for student support, including library engagement. Schaller's research describes a second year that is difficult and full of challenges for many students, yet a critical year as students seek to find themselves, to become independent adults. These are times when students need support. Those in higher education communities already attuned to assisting students in transition, such as those involved with first-year programs and services, are leading the way in the development of second-year initiatives (Gardner, Pattengale, Tobolowsky, & Hunter, 2010, p. 4).

As noted in *The role of the library in the first college year*, librarians are partners in creating the conditions for student success. Student engagement serves as both a measure of learning and an outcome in itself. Librarians have the good fortune to be able to engage with students both within and outside of the classroom. In Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practices) (Kuh, Boruff-Jones & Mark, 2007), a study of 20 four-year institutions with higher than predicted graduation rates and scores on the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), librarians were part of the pathways to engagement created to support students. These pathways teach students early in their first year about the institution's resources to support their learning and how to take advantage of them. Then they make the resources available to

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students when they need it. There are processes in place to catch and support struggling students. Second-year programs provide librarians with the opportunities to build library-based supports into these programs to better meet students where they are and to deliver appropriate resources and instruction in the moment of need.

Librarians already have a track record of creatively approaching the challenge posed by teaching concepts that are developmentally difficult for students to reach, such as the constructivist instructional activities for teaching web evaluation designed by Benjes-Small and colleagues (2013) that recognize the typical first-year student's dualist approach and scaffold the students toward a more relativistic perspective. At the same time, they recognize that the students have not mastered evaluation because many are not developmentally ready for it yet.

Librarians are in a unique position to connect with students because they have both curricular and co-curricular roles. Cahoy and Snavely (2007) note that there is frequently a split on many campuses between the academic affairs and teaching faculty and staff who focus primarily on academic and cognitive development of students and the student affairs staff who focus primarily on the affective and emotional development of students. Yet in the most influential learning environments the curricular and co-curricular are integrated and there are partnerships between academic affairs and student affairs professionals (Kuh, Boruff-Jones & Mark, 2007). In their introduction to *Environments for Student Growth and Development: Libraries and Student Affairs in*

Collaboration, Hinchliffe and Wong (2012) note that due to collaborations with both academic affairs and student affairs colleagues librarians are "uniquely situated to bridge the academic affairs/student affairs gap that unfortunately exists at all too many institutions" (p. vii).

The second-year movement in higher education, which is just beginning to gain momentum, is a perfect opportunity for librarians to integrate information literacy in a student-focused developmentally supportive way. As both Gatten (2004) and Robinson (2007) note in their articles about student developmental theories and information literacy, the most effective approach is one that introduces increasingly complex information literacy skills and concepts as students progress through their college careers. The most effective way to do this is to partner with both instructional faculty and student affairs professionals. Participating in the development of the second-year programs, which often have elements of both faculty engagement and student affairs programming, are ideal opportunities to develop sustained relationships with these key campus partners and to integrate information literacy into these programs in tangible ways.

GETTING INVOLVED

The first step in supporting second-year students is to explore what is currently happening on your local campus. Is your institution exploring the idea of a second-year program? If so, join the planning effort. Often these programs have lifelong learning or career development components to which information literacy concepts are very

relevant. At Ohio State University, the author served on one of the committees planning the pilot for the Second-year Transformational Experience Program (STEP). With a seat at the table, she was in a position to share how information literacy aligned with the overall goal of the program to help students discover their future; the current version of the program includes a required workshop component that provides a manageable way for librarians to reach participating students.

When making the arguments for information literacy in the design of second-year programs, consider sharing the Project Information Literacy report, "Learning Curve: How College Graduates Solve Information Problems Once They Join the Workplace," which articulates well the importance of information literacy skills and dispositions to workplace success (Head, 2012).

Does your campus already offer some form of second-year program? If the program includes a workshop component, develop more advanced workshops for students and market them through the campus program in addition to library marketing. Titles of second-year workshops developed at Ohio State University include "Seeking Multiple Stories: Information Skills for Global Citizenship," "Join the Research Conversation," and "Students as Authors and Creators: Share your ideas, Know your rights." Centenary College offers Sophomore Hour in the library each week and "Ask a Silly Question" day, during which students can earn prizes for answering silly questions (2014).

Miami University experienced low attendance for the workshops they offered as part of the Second Year Program series, so they are instead offering a book club aimed at second-year students that uses popular and current books (L. Miller, personal communication, September 28, 2014). They are also partnering with the Second Year Program to help provide a bridge between the first- and second-year programs by assigning students a personal librarian. Unlike other Personal Librarian programs which emphasize the first year only, the Miami University program, being piloted this year, assigns the librarian during the second semester of a student's first year and to all incoming transfer students. The personal librarian continues regular communication with her students until a major is declared, at which point the student is introduced to a subject librarian. This provides a seamless continuum of library services as the student's needs change.

Look at the goals and elements of the program to identify other places for librarian participation. For example, at Ohio State one of the key components of STEP is student interaction with faculty. To encourage this interaction the program is organized into small groups of students led by a faculty mentor; these groups meet regularly in non-classroom space, such as common areas in residence halls. This year two librarians are serving as faculty mentors.

If there is no second-year program on campus, begin by working with groups who are providing high-impact offerings to all students, but keep the needs of second-year students in mind as you develop your part. For example, undergraduate research is a high-impact practice and is an important

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program on many campuses. Offer workshops for students who are interested in learning more about undergraduate research and in the various stages of the process; topics might include "Join the Research Conversation," "Designing your Research Poster," and "Keeping your Research Organized."

Learning Communities that extend to the second year are another possibility for collaboration. At the University of Iowa, each learning community, which serves both first- and second-year students, has its own personal librarian (2014). Often these participants are subject librarians for the discipline of the learning community and are serving those academic departments. Students have the opportunity to meet their librarian through the traditional class visit and through the living learning community, thereby increasing opportunities for engagement.

CONCLUSION

The recent growth in dedicated programing for second-year college students is a wonderful opportunity for librarians to build on the strong collaborations in place at many institutions around first-year students. Typical second-year students are in developmental and transitional stages that make some information literacy instruction more relevant and appropriate than the typical first-year student. By extending instruction and programming into the second year, librarians have the potential to achieve better outcomes by reaching students more throughout their college career, and at strategically appropriate times.

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