

**The Diplomat, the Showman, the Advocate, and Other Hats:
Instructional Librarian Roles in Times of Change**

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Abstract

Information literacy instruction is a complex, ever-changing endeavor. Librarians are continually challenged to help students with research assignments, be engaging, challenge our students to improve their critical thinking skills, become lifelong learners continually, and do it all with more/less technology. Instruction librarians today may have expertise in pedagogy, technology, engaging with students, or advocating for students. Come learn from experts in different aspects of instruction with our “speed-dating” style round table session. Learn how each of our expert’s approach instruction, and engage in a short group conversation before speaking with the next expert.

Our team of expert instruction librarians include:

- Diplomat – Someone who knows everyone on their campus, can wrangle an invite to every meeting, and represents the library’s information literacy goals to the larger community.
- Show-woman – Someone who excels at incorporating popular media, humor, and other engaging elements into their information literacy sessions to keep students’ attention and help them better understand research processes through metaphors.
- Critical Pedagogist - Someone who self-identifies their teaching approach as critical pedagogy and can provide insights on how to incorporate critical discussion and questions from students into information literacy sessions
- Statistician/Marketer - Someone who is an expert in capturing and presenting outcomes of students’ learning in sessions and can turn the formative feedback into numbers, or key quotes to share with library and campus stakeholders to demonstrate the needs of our students or value added by library instruction.
- Professor - Someone who teaches in a graded classroom, is embedded in a classroom where their assignment(s) carry course credit, or formally sees students several times throughout the semester in a classroom or small group setting.

Introduction/Background

The conference theme of *The Academic Library in Times of Change* started a conversation among the SCIL Board members about the ways that instruction and the role of instruction librarians have changed over time and how our roles continue to evolve. We wanted our showcase to not only create conversations about how instruction is changing and evolving but how our identity as instruction librarians touches on many aspects of what librarians are called on to do in the course of our work. We also wanted to use this showcase as an opportunity to encourage conversation between current and prospective SCIL members, highlight the many talents of our members, and give all our attendees a chance to ask questions related to their own interests or concerns related to instruction.

The original concept was to create an Ocean's Eleven-esque team of instruction experts who could handle any instruction related challenge to come their way, and who could share their experiences and advice with other librarians who may be facing a particular challenge in their libraries and campuses. To this end, we created a list of potential personas we thought would be interesting to talk to, based on the SCIL Board's interests, and feedback from previous SCIL Works and Spring Program events. Our complete list of potential experts is below, the ones in the abstract and in bold are the roles that presented during this showcase.

List of expertise or areas of interest we hope to include:

- **Technologist** - Someone who creates tutorials, digital learning objects, works within the LMS
- **Critical Pedagogist** - Someone who self-identifies their teaching approach as critical pedagogy and can provide insights on how to incorporate critical discussion and questions from students into information literacy sessions
- **Statistician/Marketer** - Someone who is an expert in capturing and presenting outcomes of students' learning in sessions and can turn the formative feedback into numbers, or key quotes to share with library and campus stakeholders to demonstrate the needs of our students or value added by library instruction.
- **Constructivist** - Someone who creates information literacy sessions by having students work through active learning problems on a regular basis.
- **MacGyver** - Someone who can walk into a room, have all the technology fail and still manage to teach the basics of how to search the library databases or find ten peer-reviewed research articles on duct tape.
- **Professor** - Someone who teaches in a graded classroom, is embedded in a classroom where their assignment(s) care course credit, or formally sees students several times throughout the semester in a classroom or small group setting.
- **Diplomat** - Someone who knows everyone on their campus, can wrangle an invite to every meeting and represents the library's information literacy goals to the larger community.
- **Showman** - Someone who excels at incorporating popular media, humor, and other engaging elements into their information literacy sessions to keep students' attention and help them better understand research processes through metaphors.
- **Advocate** - Someone who seamlessly and tirelessly weaves their passion for social justice into their information literacy sessions, whether it is engaging students in thought-provoking discussions or always promoting excellent universal design all our students can use.

- Did we leave something out? Describe your own expertise.

We created a call for proposals and asked SCIL members to nominate themselves for a specific role and provide a brief explanation of how they embodied this role when acting as an instruction librarian. The Vice-Chair then removed any identifying information from the proposals and the experts were chosen by votes from the SCIL Board. Some categories had more than one nominee, and we were excited about some categories had no nominees that we were excited to hear more about, so we hope to repeat this activity at a future workshop.

Activities and Structure of the Discussion

When planning the showcase, the SCIL Board wanted to create the opportunity for participants to interact with panel members and have a chance to ask questions and learn from our speakers. As a group of instruction librarians, we decided that an active small group technique would better fit the type of information sharing we wanted to create better than a more traditional panel structure. We decided to borrow a speed dating style of interaction, seen at previous CARL-DIG-S and other workshops, where presenters traveled from group to group, shared information about their area of expertise then answered questions. This small group arrangement allowed for each group of participants to talk with the different instruction librarians from Southern California who submitted themselves as experts in the instruction related duties listed above. Each expert gave a five-minute introduction, talked about one or two things she was working on related to her area of expertise, then led a question and answer session for the remaining five minutes based on the interest of her small group.

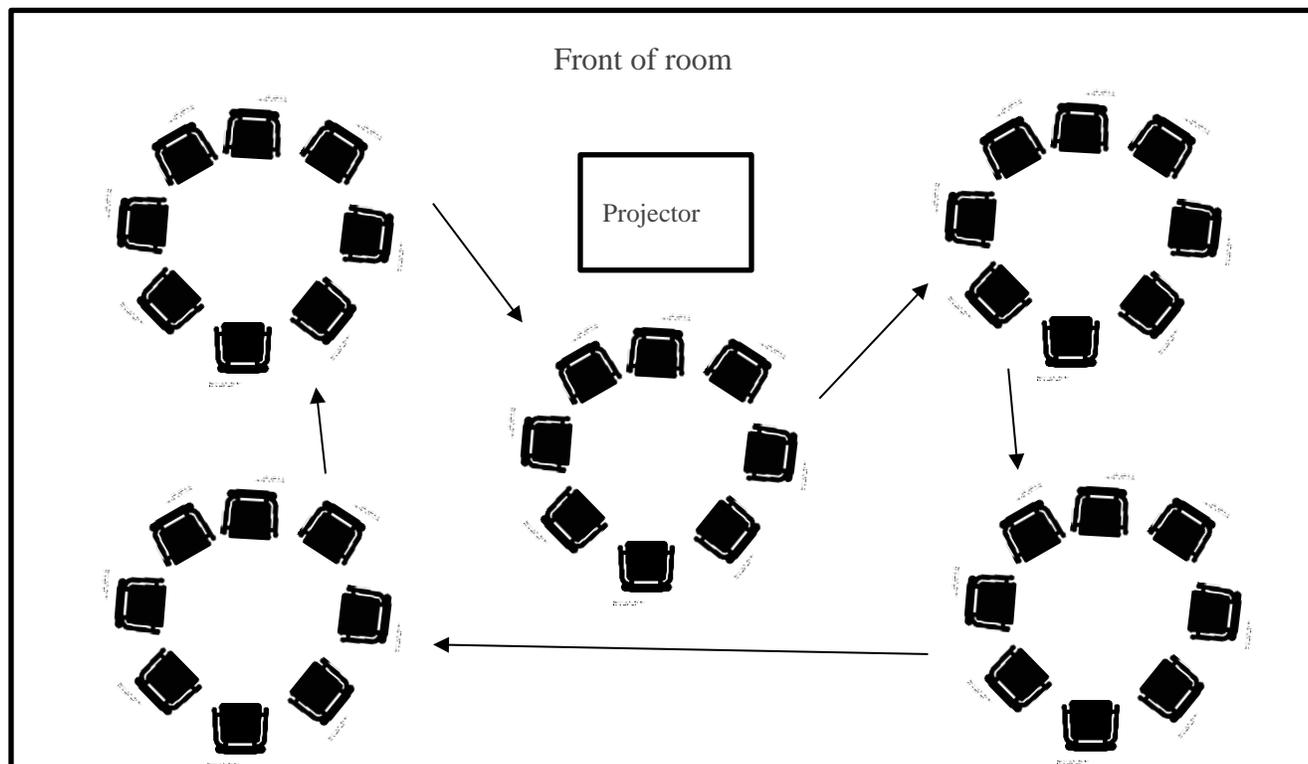
Our expert instruction librarians were given the questions (below) in case her group needed some starter questions, though from my brief observations from walking through the room they did not seem necessary. A sample timeline for the session (Table 1) and approximate room setup (Figure 1) are included for anyone who may want to replicate our model at later conferences.

Table 1

SCIL IG Showcase Estimated Timeline:

10:10-10:15	Introduction/Welcoming Remarks – Moderator/SCIL Board
10:15-10:25	First round group discussions lead by expert
1 min transition	Experts move to their second group
10:26-10:36	Second round group discussions lead by expert
1 min transition	Experts move to their third group
10:37-10:47	Third round group discussions lead by expert
1 min transition	Experts move to their fourth group
10:48-10:58	Fourth round group discussions lead by expert
1 min transition	Experts move to their fifth group
10:59-11:09	Fifth round group discussions lead by expert
11:09-11:10	Thank you, closing remarks – Moderator/SCIL Board

Figure 1
SCIL IG Showcase Room Arrangement for Speed Dating Activity



Optional Conversation Starter Questions:

1. What is one area where you would like to continue to improve as an instruction librarian?
2. If there were no end to resources, what would your ideal instruction situation look like?
3. How is instruction handled on your campus/in your library?
4. What is your favorite way to involve students in conversation?
5. Do you have a project in mind that I can provide insight on?

The conversation in the room was lively and the expert presenters and participants seemed engaged throughout the session. Members of the SCIL Board helped to set up chairs and reset the room before and after the session. The room was a bit small for this type of activity and we would have liked to have a larger space since the space became loud and warm with so many conversations going on at once. We had 47 participants, including our presenters and members of the SCIL board. Judith Opdahl, our Secretary circulated and took pictures of the participants, Mary-Michelle Moore (Vice-Chair), Zem Lee (Past Chair) and Amanda Roth (Chair) acted as timekeepers and helped the experts if they needed water or any additional assistance during the presentation. For future sessions, we'd like to have different or additional experts and perhaps some more time to do a share out at the end, but overall the program setup seemed to work well and gave us an opportunity to create small group spaces within the larger conference.

Main Takeaways from the Session

One of the reasons for the content and structure of this event was to help encourage members of SCIL, whether or not they think of themselves primarily as instruction librarians, to see how the roles they play in their libraries and on their campuses can fit into our larger mission of helping our students through information literacy instruction. There are many ways to engage with information literacy instruction; although we may not consider ourselves an expert in a given area, we may still have some expertise that a fellow librarian may not have, and sharing our projects, ideas, and opening up dialogue is a way to help grow this area of librarianship. Some of the expert roles we tried to fill can be related back to the frameworks (for example Critical Pedagogist and MacGyver both embody Authority is constructed and contextual, while the Diplomat and Advocate both contribute to Information has value). The roles themselves are helpful in giving shape to some of the duties we are all called to fulfill as librarians who do instruction.

One of the reasons for the activity setup rather than a panel discussion was an effort to give all participants an opportunity to interact with the speakers. The small group allowed individuals who may be reluctant to speak in front of the room a chance to ask questions in a smaller setting. This also helped participants to get advice that is more concrete on their own campus needs since there is more space for context in the discussion that is not available in the Q&A at the end of panel presentations.

A number of our participants work with or have previously worked with our experts. From hallway conversations, we learned that some of our participants learned more about their colleague's work on the wider campus, and how they approach instruction work after this session than they knew before. The chance to see different instruction approaches for different settings and the discussion of a variety of projects meant that even if a participant was not planning to reenact the entire project presented in her library, some piece of it may be helpful in upcoming instruction activities.

The small group format was popular among participants, if we had not run out of time, the session could have gone on for a bit longer. In future presentations perhaps we will have fewer experts and a little longer in each conversation group. One participant said that this activity was exactly the session and conversation she wanted at CARL. While part of this may have been because it was the first session and everyone's energy was still up, this was the greatest praise we could imagine for this session and this format.

The purpose of the IG Showcase is to show the best of what we are doing as an interest group and to invigorate interest in CARL members in joining or becoming more involved in the interest groups, and we think that this showcase managed to do both of these things. By relying on our membership to provide new information on current trends and needs in instruction we created connections between members and perspective members. We hope that we have empowered librarians who participated this time around to answer a future call for proposals for instruction experts if the opportunity presents itself.

Appendix

Slide-deck

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1Shnu9NIZjMAWUtwShGUKgGUgmN3MLBtGRw8_5FunxYM/edit?usp=sharing