



OFFICE HOURS

The Research Journey

By Michael Stephens

SINCE 2014, ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS from across the United States have gathered at Loyola Marymount University (LMU) in Los Angeles to be part of an immersive learning experience—the Institute for Research Design in Librarianship (IRDL).

My colleague from the School of Information, Dr. Lili Luo, and Greg Guest, a cultural anthropologist working in Durham, NC, designed the research skills-focused curriculum and served as lead instructors for the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)-funded program. For nine days in the summer the selected participants, IRDL Scholars, live and breathe all aspects of generating new knowledge for the profession.

I also had the honor to serve as an instructor for IRDL, presenting ideas about personal learning networks and mindful practice early on in the course. The inspiration I have taken from the Scholars this year was palpable.

Finding things out

In year three of IRDL, the work was serious but felt upbeat as well. The Scholars arrived at the meeting with a research proposal, and within a few days those questions were fine-tuned through learning and methodological explorations. Through discovery and recognition of the process, many Scholars expressed delight at the evolution of their projects.

This year's projects included research questions related to space planning for evolving academic libraries, the use of institutional repositories for the creative arts, the information behaviors of first-year students, reference management software adoption in multilingual research environments, faculty perceptions of information literacy and service learning, and subject guide/FAQ usability for students.

These questions share a common theme: generating evidence to enhance the services, spaces, and opportunities libraries provide to students, faculty, and staff.

Being fearless

One component of IRDL has been a focus on cultivating our own personal learning networks (PLNs) and participating in conversations about research and practice. These ideas led to some honest sharing about the skills required to have presence within various networks and to be a wholehearted researcher. For some, it meant navigating unfamiliar territory online—Facebook groups, Twitter, and Slack—while building a PLN.

For others, it was a more personal form of risk taking. Lorelei Rutledge, faculty services librarian at the J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, told the group she

Support & encouragement

IRDL was conceived in part to create a network of research-focused academic librarians and has been successful at that goal. Coauthorships, group presentations, and panel discussions are just some of the outcomes.

The ties seem to hold: “The 2014 IRDL cohort formed a strong online community that continues to provide support (both instructional and emotional) to this day,” first-year IRDL Scholar John Jackson, who now works as outreach and communications librarian at LMU, told me.

I fear, however, that some scholars may not have the support of their home

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needed “courage to contact people who are writing on my topic. Most people are friendly, of course, but I always feel vulnerable in that moment when I am sharing my half-formed ideas.”

Raymond Pun, first-year student success librarian at California State University, Fresno, and a 2012 *LJ* Mover & Shaker, said the process made him feel vulnerable as well, a good thing, because “learning from outside of my comfort zone has been an enriching experience in itself.”

Derrick Jefferson, communication librarian at American University, Washington, DC, is focusing on diversity, inclusion, and identity. “These conversations are hard to have,” he said, urging people to be open and honest when talking about issues related to race, sexuality, and gender despite any awkwardness. “It’s not easy for me as well, but trust that I will lean into my discomfort if you will lean into yours.”

institutions to “find things out.” More than once in our discussions about research culture back at home, participants acknowledged a lack of encouragement or a push to publish without the requisite time and resources to accomplish the work.

Support at the institutional level is necessary for research success. Novice researchers should have access not only to learning models similar to IRDL—in person and virtually—but also to the resources needed in their home institutions to create and share scholarly projects.

Understanding what it means to embark on a research journey—to collect, analyze, and publish illuminating new knowledge as part of our practice of librarianship—should be promoted and commended.

Michael Stephens (mstephens7@mac.com) is Assistant Professor at the School of Information, San José State University, CA