Maximizing Resources: A Look at Library Orientation Programs

A typical and recurrent situation librarians face is the need to expand or redirect services in an environment in which the resources available remain fairly constant. As of this writing, many health sciences librarians are in the midst of the flurry of library orientations which seem to eat up those fixed resources. When these same librarians read this column they will be starting to contemplate the next seasonal peak of orientations. Several observations, questions, and conclusions result from an examination of the significant effort that goes into introducing new students and faculty to the library.

For the purpose of the following discussion, orientations are individual and group introductions to the basic arrangement of the library's materials and services. The orientation is intended to set the stage and pique interest in further instruction, as well as present the library in a welcoming way to potential users. Therefore it is both a service and a publicity tool.

Format

Various techniques have been used to orient users to the library. The traditional tour, in which users are led through the building by a guide who points out and explains various features of perceived interest, has some variations. Lynch gives a good description of past practice for conducted tours and reports results of a survey of libraries identified as giving such tours. She also discusses self-guided tours in print or on audiocassette, slide/tape, film, and videotape tours. The advantages and disadvantages of each of these techniques is summarized, comments from librarians and some users are interspersed, and suggestions given for making these more effective.[1]

More recent descriptions of the use of self-instructional techniques for orientation have been published by health sciences librarians.[2][3][4] Other formats of this type of instruction include CAI, workbooks, sign systems exercises, and programmed instruction. Usually a combination of these techniques is used.

At the Health Sciences Library at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, orientations are given in a classroom equipped with a microcomputer connected to a large-screen videoprojector, a terminal connected to PERLINE (journal location system), and a video player. These are used during orientations to present a ten-minute videotape introduction to major services of the library and demonstrations of PERLINE, the Online Catalog, and database searching, as appropriate. In addition, the classroom is stocked with multiple copies of *Medical Subject Headings*, along with an overhead transparency

---

[1] Lynch, Mary Jo. "Library Tours: the First Step." In: *Educating the Library User*, by John Lubans, Jr. NY: R.R. Bowker Co. 1974, pp. 254-68.

[2] Hall, Virginia B.; Krautheim, Daniel; and Hansra, Baljit S. "A Slide-Tape Program for Beginning Pharmacy Students: Effects on Learning." *Bull Med Libr Assoc* 65 (Oct. 1977):443-5.

[3] Allen, Stephanie N.; Mahan, J. Maurice; and Graham, Irene. "The Implementation of a Large-Scale Self-Instructional Course in Medical Information Resources. " *Bull Med Libr Assoc* 67 (July 1979): 302-7.

[4] Martin, Jess A.; Marcotte, Joan M.; and Baxter, John E. "PLATO in the Library." *Southeastern Librarian* 31 (Spring 1981): 14-5.

projector, for brief introductions to *MeSH* for some groups. Although limited instruction is a component of these sessions, the major emphasis is on presenting the Health Sciences Library as an inviting environment for study and research and that a helpful professional staff is available to assist users. Walk-through tours are the exception (based on earlier assessments of these) and are typically conducted for small groups of new faculty, foreign visitors, accreditation teams, and those viewing the library for architectural design purposes and similar special purposes.

Evaluation

As referred to in the opening paragraphs of this column, the Health Sciences Library Information Management Education Services (IME) faculty has reached an impasse which often results from successful programs. The demand for existing programs exceeds the resources of the library, thus making it difficult to develop needed initiatives in other areas of instruction or to provide advanced levels of instruction. Many of the difficulties of such a situation have been mentioned frequently in the literature, not the least of which is staff burnout.

As a result of this impasse, the IME faculty will be devising a plan to evaluate the current orientation program and develop alternatives which will release experienced faculty for other needed instructional design and development. The evaluation will most likely consist of some combination of faculty and student interviews, brainstorming with library staff, a survey instrument, a literature review, discussions with other health sciences librarians in similar settings, and feedback from changes made in the program. Some of these steps have been taking place in an informal mode on an ongoing basis, but efforts will be strengthened and made more formal Individualized and self-instructional alternatives are attractive. Initial efforts to discover existing CAI for orientation purposes have led to the conclusion that for this application, in-house development would be necessary because the emphasis is on the local arrangement of the facility and access to services. A limited experiment with CAI in a Pharmacy Practice course is under development. A self-study guide has been used for several years with this group of 170 students and it is forming the basis for the CAI program. In addition, several helpful articles on CAI design and implementation have been identified.[5][6][7] A request to LOEX produced twenty-eight self-guided tours, primarily from large academic libraries. Only two of these came from health sciences libraries. A library floor plan has been revised using the microcomputer program "PC Storyboard" and is available for use on the microcomputer/video projector in the library classroom or in paper copy.[8] Further use of the "Storyboard" software will be explored as well.

One of the primary advantages of librarian-conducted orientations has been the importance of the human contact and the first impression users receive of the library. Those who have turned to self-instructional techniques such as the ones just described, have justified their defection by stating that this personal contact is a luxury at a time when resources are limited. A position that might be debated

---

[5] Fitzgerald, Patricia A.; Arnott, Patricia; and Richards, Deborah. "Computer-Assisted Instruction in Libraries: Guidelines for Effective Lesson Design." *Library Hi Tech* 4 (Summer 1986):29-37.

[6] Nipp, Deanna; and Straub, Ron. "The Design and Implementation of a Microcomputer Program for Library Orientation." *Research Strategies* 4 (Spring 1986): 60-7.

[7] Haynes, Evelyn. "Computer Assisted Library Instruction: an Annotated Bibliography" *Colorado Libraries* 11 (March 1985): 31-5.

[8] International Business Machines Corporation. *PC Storyboard.* Menlo Park, CA: International Business Machines Corporation, March 1985.

is whether the application of computers and self-instruction is more suited to advanced stages of learning rather than at the point of entry, i.e., a time during which the new library user is perhaps intimidated and more in need of the "high touch" versus "high tech" approach. On the other hand, CAI, workbooks, and other self-instructional techniques seem well designed to handle information which must be conveyed in a more or less standardized way on numerous occasions.

Dialogue Invited

The resources/demand dilemma is a constant problem, and the column editor eagerly invites further discussion on this subject as it relates to information management education. Suggestions, whether tested or not, of labor-saving approaches are particularly welcomed. Techniques for maximizing other resources, such as handouts (which seem to require frequent revision), are also requested. Perhaps these shared ideas will help with the next onslaught of new library users.

Francesca Allegri

University of North Carolina

Chapel Hill, NC

Comments and suggestions should be sent to the Column Editor: Francesca Allegri.