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Piloting a Peer Instruction Observation Program for a Core Business Course

The William M. White Business Library at the University of Colorado Boulder is a branch library located within the Leeds School of Business. The business library is part of the university library system, although it primarily focuses on services for Leeds students or students who participate in business-focused endeavors. The current undergraduate enrollment at Leeds across all degrees for 2019 is 3,736 students. Through a strong partnership with the instructors for a core business course, the librarians can have face-to-face contact with most of the BBA population. The library teaches an instruction literacy workshop for approximately 30 sections of Business Community Strategy 1030 (BCOR 1030) in the fall and spring semesters. While this course is required for all business students pursuing a BBA, most students take it during their freshman or sophomore year.

A mix of tenure-track faculty and various classifications of staff positions from the business library teach the workshops for BCOR 1030. The lesson plan for BCOR 1030 is the same across all sections. However, some sessions are 50 minutes long, while others are 75 minutes long. In the summer of 2019, I proposed the idea of the peer instruction observation program at a business branch meeting to make sure all staff and library faculty felt comfortable and were willing to participate. The goals of the pilot observation program were to help the participants reflect on our teaching practices, to provide constructive feedback, and to help with our professional development. The observations were not included in any annual evaluations, rather they were meant as personal growth tools. Though six library instructors taught the BCOR 1030 sections in the Fall of 2019, only five participated in the observation program.

At another business branch meeting in early October 2019, I introduced the Instruction Reflection Package, which I created for this program. The package is modeled after the "Teaching Observation & Evaluation Package" created by the CU Boulder Libraries' Teaching Evaluation Subcommittee. The Reflection Package includes expectations and guidelines to help frame the observation session. Expectations for the program were

that each person would observe at least one other library member's BCOR 1030 session. As the Business Instruction coordinator, I created a sign-up sheet listing the times, locations, BCOR instructors and enrollments for each section of BCOR 1030. The library team then signed up for sections based on their availability. The sessions took place over a two-week period in October 2019. Each library team member signed up to teach from two to ten sections. For the instruction observation program, an extra column was added for members to sign up for observations. We set a deadline for sign ups so everyone that wanted to participate had at least one person signed up to observe, and to also share this information with the BCOR instructors.

As part of the program, the observer and library instructor would meet once before the instruction session. Together, they filled out the Pre-Workshop Observation Sheet which included questions such as: goals for the session; areas the library instructor wanted feedback on; how the library instructor described their teaching style; anticipated issues, etc. The package also included a list of "Dimensions of Instruction" within an "Observation Checklist" page. In order to not be overwhelmed by trying to observe all dimensions outlined in the "Observation Checklist," the observer and instructor chose two to three items from that list to focus on during the observation. After the session, they were to meet within one week to discuss how the session went, provide feedback about the requested dimensions, and to debrief. At the end of the BCOR 1030 sessions the entire library team of instructors met to discuss the pilot, identify areas for improvement, and provide overall feedback.

At the end of the program, all the participants thought the observation was useful in some manner. One participant shared that they realized more what the overall objectives of the BCOR 1030 lesson plan were meant to be, after observing someone else teach it. Another individual said it was nice to see someone else with a completely different style. Indeed, most participants came away with a new technique or different points to emphasize during the lesson.

While the pilot had a positive reception, there were some obstacles in this first iteration. The first problematic theme was that of timing. Firstly, I did not send out the Reflection Package early enough for the library team to really contemplate and understand true expectations. Secondly, since library staff and faculty have many other duties, it was difficult to pick a session to observe and also schedule the pre- and post-observation meetings. This issue was further complicated because some instructors were observed more often than others. Additionally, due to timing constraints, not all participants were able to prioritize scheduling enough time for the pre- and post-session meetings. Some meetings happened via email, were rushed, or happened more than a week later, which led to incomplete feedback.

Location was another prominent issue. The business library is currently undergoing major renovations. In order to accommodate this disruption, the business library team is temporarily displaced to other locations on campus. Since the classroom within the business library was unavailable during this time, BCOR 1030 sessions were held in classrooms across campus. In addition to building in enough time to travel around

campus, the instructors encountered issues with the room layout and temperamental technology, which inhibited planned learning activities.

The last major issue revealed during the pilot was the use of a lesson plan that needs to be re-worked. The current outline has too many activities packed in, and most library instructors feel they struggle to get through all of them, which negatively affects the objectives of the lesson plan. The library instructors feel pressured to finish all the activities instead of being able to focus on students meeting the learning objectives, and making sure true learning occurs.

In balancing the successes and flaws of the instruction observation program, the next iteration will hopefully include the following improvements. Firstly, sending out information earlier in the semester and setting a target number of observations per library instructor to help ease the timing issues. Another suggestion is to have instructors opt-in to the program. This tactic would allow individuals who have time during the semester to meaningfully participate. We do plan to offer this program again in the future after we re-work the core lesson plan. This alteration, along with clearer expectations, will help us to continue our own growth in instruction skills, continue and strengthen our partnership with the BCOR 1030 instructors, change the lesson plan in order to focus on student learning, and help students learn about the services of the William M. White Business Library.

References

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