Is Your Library Serving Adult Learners?

Like many academic librarians, we often use the summer semester to reflect, revise, and plan for the fall. In summer 2012, during a conversation about rewarding reference interactions, we stumbled upon an "aha moment," discovering an opportunity to connect targeted library outreach with an underserved user group. We realized how much we both enjoy working with adult learners and how they always seem genuinely interested in gaining skills to make themselves better library users—and therefore better students. This conversation became the catalyst for an idea for a library course designed specifically for adult learners.

Teaching was nothing new to us, but creating a semester-long course presented new challenges. How could we convince university administrators of the course's value? How would we incorporate the standards of our profession regarding teaching and learning? How would we create a course that values the life experiences and perspectives of adult learners?

GETTING ESTABLISHED

The first step was to conduct an environmental scan of our university's evening degree program offerings. We found general studies one-credit courses targeting areas like career development or writing and study skills. It seemed logical that helping students develop high-level information literacy skills could be a part of foundational course offerings. We petitioned the college administrators and presented our idea of a for-credit general studies course aimed at improving students' information literacy and research skills. We were surprised at how receptive they were; however, we still had major hurdles to getting our course on the books. Besides creating the syllabus, we had to research peer institutions' approaches to information literacy in evening programs. After rounds of review and revision, by early fall we were successful: Mastering Research in Today's Academic Library, a one-credit hour pass/fail course, would appear in the spring 2013 catalog!

COURSE DESIGN

No longer faced with the dilemma of one-shot instruction, we had a full semester, which was simultaneously exciting and daunting. We thought it imperative that our lectures encompass established information literacy standards and the Associa-

LACUNY conference, the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit ruled the tracking program unlawful.

Much of the afternoon's proceedings centered on various forms of librarian advocacy, especially teaching students about privacy.

Sarah Lamdan, associate law library professor at CUNY Law School, discussed the instructional role of librarians as advocates for social media privacy. John Jay emerging technologies and distance services librarian Robin Camille Davis recommended teaching students to use Google ad settings, tracking blockers such as Ghostery or Privacy Badger, and the Inspect Element tool in their browsers to examine sites' underlying code.

Tony Doyle, associate professor at the Hunter College library, explained online anonymous web searching through obfuscation, suggesting digital solutions such as the Tor network, which masks a user's identity via encryption and multiple routers; TrackMeNot, which generates a smokescreen of dummy requests to mask each query; and DuckDuckGo, a search engine that does not store or track user information. CUNY Graduate Center associate librarian for collections Alycia Sellie took critical aim at how digital rights management (DRM) can compromise the privacy of ebook borrowers. In most cases, she said, customers have a choice as to whether they wish to comply with commercial features that limit privacy. However, it is a much bigger sacrifice to forgo library electronic content to avoid accepting DRM rules, especially now that some content is available only in electronic format. So, she said, libraries should be aware of their own options for providing DRM-free e-materials.

Privacy literacy

Macrina offered a brief history of library active resistance to privacy threats, including the FBI's late–Cold War clandestine surveillance program that targeted librarians.

The NSA's data retrieval system, Macrina explained, is sophisticated and can pull information from any Internet communication using a major commercial platform. Section 215 of the Patriot Act, "Access to records and other items under [the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978]" (commonly known as the "library records" provision), authorizes government collection of broadly defined "tangible things" to assist in a security investigation.

The LFP, which earlier this year won a Knight Foundation News Challenge grant, is dedicated to educating librarians on intellectual freedom issues. Macrina favors encryption tools and free open source software.

On a small scale, Macrina suggested that every librarian make time to assess the library's resources, think about who might compromise it, and imagine what could be done to protect it.

In addition to the previously mentioned Tor and DuckDuckGo, she noted several solutions that can be easily implemented: the EFF's HTTPS Everywhere extension, which automatically provides secure authentication for every
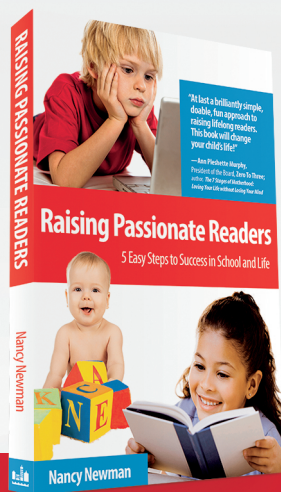
tion of College and Research Libraries' (ACRL) threshold concepts. We designed our lectures to boost students' practical library skills while also helping them see themselves as a part of a community in which research goes beyond mere reporting of information but is something we collect, create, and even contest.

Because adult learners' needs and expectations differ from those of the typical undergraduate, we needed to tailor our approach to course design and teaching. Evening students—generally working adults—know enough to know they don't know enough. They want to know more but don't have much time. This confluence creates a motivated learner. In our research, we encountered some useful principles of Adult Learning Theory: adult learning is filtered through the lens of their established knowledge and life experiences and adult learners are highly practical and goal-oriented. Throughout the semester, we tried to be deliberate in practicing these principles, which guided our scheduling,

lecture style, and assignments. Thus, we emphasized that this course would not only help toward their ultimate goal of a college degree but also help them gain transferable skills useful in the workplace. We offered it at a time that didn't compete with degree-required courses, designed it as a companion to research and writing-intensive courses, and encouraged students to use research and writing assignments from their other courses for in-class exercises.

FEEDBACK AND DISCOVERY
The response has been overwhelmingly positive from students and administration alike. An unanticipated discovery we were able to share with program administrators was that some students would also benefit from a general computer literacy course. It has allowed us to grow in our instruction skills and opened additional learning opportunities at our university for adult learners who are trying to navigate the new world of college research and the academic library.

REPLICABLE
Here are some tips for a for-credit course:

• **Know your audience:** Who are the adult learners on your campus? How is your library serving them?
• **Make sure your class is unique.**
• **Be prepared** with concise, jargon-free explanations about the needs met and course relevance for student success.
• **Allow lead time:** Catalogs are in the works long before the semester begins. A course proposal usually needs to pass through several layers of committees before approval is granted.
• **Be flexible:** Revise and adjust as your proposal goes through the process.
• **Timing is everything:** Try to schedule your course at a time that does not compete with degree-required classes.
• **Marketing:** Both new and established courses need publicity—optional, one-credit classes especially. Consider academic advisors, campus email lists, and well-placed, eye-catching flyers.

site used in a system; Textsecure, which encrypts text messages; Signal, which encrypts phone calls on Android devices; the password management utility KeePassX; and Tails, a flash drive–

based Linux browser that anonymizes all data.

Macrina acknowledges that her paranoia levels have increased along with her involvement in privacy issues but feels that

her cause—and her chance to encourage a privacy-literate population—is worth the worry. As librarians, she said, we have the ability to "make privacy protection tools ubiquitous and mainstream."**—Lisa Peet**