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Working information literacy : the instruction librarian specialty in job advertisements, 1973-2013.

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Working Information Literacy:

The Instruction Librarian Specialty in Job Advertisements, 1973-2013

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Abstract

As information literacy has developed into one of the library profession's most important guiding principles, library instruction programs have increased in complexity and academic librarian job duties have expanded. This paper broadly tracks the evolution of information literacy instruction through an examination of select literature, as well as teaching-related requirements listed in select professional job advertisements published in ten-year increments from 1973-2013. These advertisements reflect the growing diversity of teaching-oriented positions appearing over time and the increasingly specialized nature of the required qualifications for those positions. The advertisements also demonstrate how information literacy continues to provide a conceptual rationale by which academic librarians establish themselves as central to the educational missions of their institutions. In light of this ongoing process of situating librarians within campus communities as experts in pedagogy, the profession must consider not only how we are preparing new librarians for specialized teaching roles but also how we can meet the challenges and capitalize on the opportunities inherent in the adoption of such roles.

Keywords: Information literacy; Library instruction; Teaching; Academic library jobs

Introduction

To varying degrees, academic librarians in the United States have participated in instructional activities since at least the early nineteenth century (Salony, 1995). However, in the final decades of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, the library profession developed a more ambitious educational agenda, moving beyond bibliographic instruction in the use of library materials to focus on information literacy (Behrens, 1994; Salony, 1995). While there has been debate over the years about its value as a distinct foundational concept for library work (Foster, 1993), information literacy has undoubtedly influenced the field to a significant degree. Indeed, as O'Connor (2009b) has observed in a critical history of the concept, information literacy serves "to rearticulate and legitimate librarians' claim to an educational jurisdiction" (p. 493). In other words, information literacy provides the conceptual rationale by which librarians establish themselves as central to the educational missions of their institutions.

Unsurprisingly, as information literacy developed into one of the profession's most powerful and successful guiding principles, library instruction programs increased in complexity, expanding librarian job duties. This paper attempts to broadly track the evolution and diversification of instructional roles and initiatives over the last forty years through an examination of select literature. To illustrate this progression in the profession, the authors examined teaching-related requirements listed in professional job advertisements published from 1973-2013. During this period, job ads for instruction librarians reflect the growing diversity of teaching-oriented positions appearing over time and the increasingly specialized nature of the required qualifications for those positions.

To track this progression, the authors examined job advertisements posted in either

College & Research Libraries News, *American Libraries*, or the *ALA Joblist* website. We examined every ad in that particular year (1973, 1983, 1993, 2003, 2013) in ten-year increments from 1973-2013 to compare the teaching requirements against the literature of the day. This was only a sampling of available jobs, not a comprehensive survey as not all jobs available were ~~not~~ advertised in these sources. Only academic library jobs that expressly focused on instruction or teaching were included. The analysis focused solely on requirements for teaching skills, knowledge, or experience. The authors recorded all teaching related mandatory and/or preferred requirements. Afterwards, the findings were analyzed against current thinking and the historical context of information literacy's development. Through these ads, we can observe theory transforming into practice, as well as trace the evolution of information literacy into one of the cornerstones of the library profession.

As Table 1 indicates, information literacy positions have risen dramatically since 1973, reflecting the increased professional focus on information literacy during the same time.

Table 1- Number of Teaching-Focused Positions by Year

Year	# of Ads
1973	5
1983	10
1993	31
2003	16*
2013	73

*The lower number of ads in 2003 denotes the emergence of online-only postings of job advertisements. These advertisements are not archived, rendering them inaccessible to the authors.

In addition to the number of ads, the amount of teaching-related requirements for the positions also increased. In the 1973 ads collected for this study, there were only 4 requirements directly related to teaching, whereas the 2013 ads listed 9 separate concepts (Table 2).

Table 2- Number of Stated Teaching Requirements by Year

Year	Number of Stated Teaching Requirements
1973	4
1983	4
1993	7
2003	7
2013	9

The following discussion examines some key trends in information literacy since the 1970s in greater depth and shows how these trends are reflected in job ads.

1970s

Organized advocacy for library instruction began in earnest in the early 1970s, following Evan Farber's influential presentation on the Earlham College library instruction program at the 1969 American Library Association conference (Hardesty, 1993). A key model for future endeavors in the field, the Earlham program incorporated training in library materials across disciplines, and librarians were involved in the "curricular process" to a significant degree (Farber, 1974, p. 161).

Soon after Farber's presentation, library instruction became an important professional concern at the national level with the establishment of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Bibliographic Instruction Task Force in 1971 and Eastern Michigan University's Library Orientation and Instruction Exchange (LOEX) in 1972 (Salony, 1995). During this period, bibliographic instruction, as it came to be known, emphasized what Hopkins

(1982) has referred to as "tools and locational procedures" with little regard for pedagogical theory (p. 196). On the other hand, the diverse array of instructional approaches covered in the 1974 anthology *Educating the Library User* (Lubans, 1974) demonstrates that librarians were becoming increasingly interested in pedagogy and the role of the library in the curriculum. Moreover, in his contribution to that volume, Kirk (1974) foreshadows the transition from bibliographic instruction to information literacy, advocating the development of user education programs "designed to improve students' capabilities to collect information effectively and efficiently, evaluate critically, and communicate with others effectively" (p. 88). Kirk's statements indicate that librarians were interested in formulating a conceptual rationale for library instruction.

Likewise at this time, Frick (1975) argued that reference librarians needed to re-define their role to serve a more explicitly educational purpose. According to Frick, rather than simply deliver information, reference librarians should teach users how to locate and analyze information. Frick goes on to promote a pedagogical agenda that today's readers would recognize as information literacy in all but name. She argues that library instruction should focus on "the technical analysis of information structure," "social and ethical questions concerning access to information," and "the implications of the information function in society" (p. 14). Thus, librarians were taking the initial steps towards a more sophisticated conception of their teaching, beyond the basics of catalog searching and subject headings.

In addition to the gradual expansion of the librarian's teaching role, information technology became more prominent in the 1970s. As President of the Information Industry Association, Paul Zurkowski (1974) introduced the phrase "information literacy" and linked the concept to the plethora of "new information processing technologies" that were being integrated

into economic and social life (p. 23). O'Connor (2009b) has discussed the important influence of technology on the evolution of information literacy in the early 1980s, and some librarians were already commenting on the relationship between instruction and technology in the first half of the 1970s. For example, Frick (1975) noted how tools such as Social Sciences Citation Index, Permuterm , and KWIC Indexes were changing the face of information retrieval in the disciplines, while Williamson (1971) envisioned the development of "more efficient bibliographic tools" to aid patrons in their searches (p. 213). In 1974, Clark highlighted the potential value of "computer-assisted instruction" (or CAI) as an additional method for meeting users' needs (p. 347).

Even though instruction was discussed relatively frequently in the professional literature of the 1970s, few teaching-focused positions were advertised in the 1973 volumes of *College & Research Libraries News* and *American Libraries*. The authors identified only 5 job ads that specifically emphasized instruction in 1973. The qualifications listed were minimal, reflecting the relative newness of the concept of formal library instruction and the fact that instruction was not yet considered an integral part of academic librarianship. Librarians were writing more about instruction, but the specialty of "instruction librarian" or "teaching librarian" was not well-established, and few institutions were advertising for these now commonplace positions. The teaching-related qualifications for the small number of positions (5) within this specialty area were relatively minimal, reflecting the newness of concept and the lack of formal standards or policy for bibliographic instruction (Table 3).

Table 3- Required Teaching Qualifications for Instruction Positions in 1973

Job Requirement	Number of Ads Requesting Requirement	Percentage of Ads Requesting Requirement
Experience with or Knowledge of Instructional Technology	2	40%
Possession of a general commitment and/or skill towards bibliographic instruction	1	20%
Education in Instruction or User Education	1	20%
Teaching Experience	1	20%

Despite the limited qualifications, these ads reflect instructional trends that would achieve

prominence over the course of the 1970s and 1980s. In line with Williamson's (1971), Clark's

(1974), and Frick's (1975) comments, technology is defined as an important aspect of the

instruction specialty. Furthermore, there is an explicit expectation that job candidates will have

pedagogical knowledge, training, and experience. In this manner, we can observe the role of the

librarian as teaching expert, a role associated with the information literacy movement, coming

into clearer view. That said, the specific nature of the knowledge, training, and experience is not

defined beyond basic terminology. The expansion of the teaching role that would occur in

subsequent decades, with an emphasis on more specialized skills, had not moved beyond an

infant stage.

1980s

The information literacy movement truly began to take shape in the 1980s, as information

technology continued to grow in complexity and librarians became interested in participating in a

larger educational reform conversation from which they had been excluded (Behrens, 1994;

O'Connor, 2009b). During this time, librarians argued that the academic library should play a more active and direct role in student learning and that the librarian should act as a professional educator. Benson (1984) viewed faculty status in itself as "superficial" and stated that librarians should "not only have similar qualifications as the faculty, but they also must do similar things, such as teaching, publishing, attending professional meetings, and in general keeping abreast of faculty concerns" (p. 219). In this manner, librarians could re-define themselves as expert teachers and refashion the library as the focal point of the curriculum—the "heart" of the university (p. 219).

Indeed, Rader (1984) advocated a similarly ambitious vision, calling for the development of a "teaching library" that does not merely serve as a "support unit" but "actively advances" the educational, research, and community service agenda of its institution (p. 234). Rader argued that a "comprehensive library instruction program" is essential to this vision, and she further described the attributes of an academic teaching library, including instructing patrons to use library resources, developing life-long learning skills on campus and in the community, meeting researchers' information needs, collaborating with teaching faculty, and applying current technology, among other things (pp. 234-235). Clearly, the nature of many academic library jobs would have to change in light of these expanding educational functions. New kinds of expertise would eventually be required if librarians were to deliver on the promise of the teaching library concept and prove their worth in the learning process.

As interest in the library as an educational center continued to grow throughout the 1980s, librarians began to delve more deeply into pedagogical theory and adopt more specialized perspectives on teaching, evidenced in part by the introduction of the new *Research Strategies* scholarly journal (Salony, 1995). Publications on library instruction began to emphasize more

formal instructional design principles. For instance, Cottam (1982) argued that "effective user education programs are founded on systematic planning and design" (p. 333). Following the lead of Cottam and others later in the decade, Miller and Bratton (1988) wrote about the development of a "systematic methodology" for designing bibliographic instruction sessions (p. 545). Some librarians were also suggesting that instruction needed to be more sophisticated and focus on conceptual learning and critical thinking (McCormick, 1983). Eventually, such conversations on pedagogy would become associated with the information literacy movement, which was not formally defined until the end of the decade (O'Connor, 2009b). Even so, Margaret Chisholm's formation of the American Library Association's Presidential Committee on Information Literacy in 1987, as well as the publication of Carol Collier Kuhlthau's *Information Skills for an Information Society: A Review of Research* in the same year, foreshadow the ascendancy of information literary in the coming decade. Sponsored by the U.S. Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Kuhlthau's (1987) report delineates the characteristics of information literacy, moving beyond narrow conceptions of library "location skills" and adopting a broader focus on "the abilities to manage complex masses of information generated by computers and mass media" (p. 2).

Despite the growing professional emphasis on instruction in the early 1980s, requirements for teaching positions in academic libraries had not changed much since 1973 (Table 4). Although the number of ads doubled from 5 in 1973 to 10 in 1983, they still represented relatively few positions. Candidates were typically expected to have teaching experience and general knowledge of pedagogical methods. In keeping with Cottam's (1982) aforementioned comments on instructional design, knowledge and experience in this area were mentioned in several ads. The ads showed increased demand for teaching experience and

preparation for classroom instruction over the 1973 position requirements. O'Connor (2006) refers to this as moving past "tool-based skills" to instill "competencies that are transportable across multiple information seeking processes and in multiple environments" (p. 131).

Table 4- Required Teaching Qualifications for Instruction Positions in 1983

Job Requirement	Number of Ads Requesting Requirement	Percentage of Ads Requesting Requirement
Teaching Experience	7	70%
Possession of a general commitment and/or skill towards bibliographic instruction	4	40%
Knowledge or Experience with Educational Design	2	20%
Education in Instruction or User Education	1	10%

1990s

As the 1980s came to a close, the American Library Association Presidential Committee on Information Literacy released its final report (1989). This report stood as one of the first official documents to sanction information literacy and define the characteristics of an information literate individual. O'Connor (2009b) has stressed the vital importance of the Final Report, as it represents "the first comprehensive public claim to a new jurisdiction of expertise for the profession" (p. 505). Librarians were formally adopting educational expertise as a fundamental aspect of the profession, with information literacy serving as the disciplinary subject matter.

It is no surprise that, just a few years after the Presidential report, Martin and Jacobson (1995) could accurately proclaim that bibliographic instruction was "mainstream, occupying an accepted, respected, and expected place in librarianship" (p. 5). Nevertheless, the term

"bibliographic instruction" would essentially be supplanted by "information literacy" during the 1990s. Rader (1990) specifically addressed this issue in a short piece for *College & Research Libraries News*, arguing that information literacy, a skill set that fosters "lifelong self-education in a global, electronic environment," is the central impetus and outcome for bibliographic instruction (p. 20). For Rader, information literacy goes beyond simply learning to use the libraries' resources to understanding more holistically the processes for acquiring, evaluating, and storing information. Echoing Rader's emphasis on the larger progressive agenda of information literacy, Behrens (1994) noted that society's growing dependence on information fueled the need for more information literate individuals and identified several main trends in the 1990s, including information literacy's presence in "the wider literacy continuum" (pp. 317-318). The growing importance of information literacy in the profession continued in tandem with the growing importance and rapid evolution of information technology. Chadley and Gavryck (1989) noted that, by 1988, bibliographic instruction had become an integral part of library services and had been precipitated by advancements in library technology. In addition to the standard print resources, users required training on CD-ROMs, online catalogs, and online databases, such as DIALOG (Salony, 1995). Librarians also continued to promote the importance of instructional design. For instance, Allen (1995) discussed using educational techniques such as active learning and active teaching, which called for increased planning and design of bibliographic instruction sessions.

As information literacy grew in importance, the number of teaching-focused positions increased. Of the job ads collected for this paper, there were three times as many in 1993 as there were in 1983. Likewise, the number of qualifications for these positions began to expand substantially (Table 5). 1983 saw four teaching-related qualifications, while, in 1993, the number

almost doubled to seven. Teaching experience became a must, and nearly half the positions

expected some sort of general knowledge or skill towards providing bibliographic instruction.

Overall, the teaching librarian of the 1990s needed an expanded skill set that included

instructional technology experience, educational design knowledge, and an increased expectation

of information literacy knowledge and teaching experience. Ariew (2014) notes that, in the

1990s, "the emphasis moves to offering quality teaching, providing user-centered environments,

and reframing the role of libraries as central to the teaching and learning process" (p. 214).

Table 5- Required Teaching Qualifications for Instruction Positions in 1993

Job Requirement	Number of Ads Requesting Requirement	Percentage of Ads Requesting Requirement
Teaching Experience	24	77%
Possession of a general commitment and/or skill towards bibliographic instruction	15	48%
Experience with or Knowledge of Instructional Technology	2	6%
Knowledge or Experience with Educational Design	2	6%
Coordination of an Information Literacy Program	2	6%
Education in Instruction or User Education	1	3%
Teaching Collaboration	1	3%

2000s

The first decade of the twenty-first century was a time of tremendous growth for the

information literacy movement, as many academic libraries completely adopted a teaching focus.

Many instruction-related trends that we now recognize as the status quo were either introduced

or more fully developed during this period: assessment of learning outcomes, specially designed

learning commons spaces, and collaborations with writing centers and other campus groups (Ariew, 2014). The creation and widespread dissemination of the ACRL *Information Competency Standards for Higher Education* (2000) reflected librarians' interest in defining their instructional mission and assessing outcomes. As Ariew (2014) observed, these standards "legitimized information literacy and its place in the academy for librarians and library administrators" (p. 215). Indeed, the standards were taken up almost immediately as a central focus of assessment-related discussions (e.g., Davidson, McMillen, & Maughn, 2002; Fernekes & Nelson, 2002).

As would be expected, an increased emphasis on the preparation of librarians as teachers, including increased training in pedagogy, emerged. Originally developed by Cerise Oberman in the late 1990s and continuing into the present day, the ACRL Information Literacy Immersion Program became a national locus for instructional training and professional networking in the 2000s (Lindsay & Baron, 2002). Additionally, Albrecht and Baron (2002) explored how MLIS programs were preparing students to teach, particularly in light of the new standards, while Davidson, McMillen, and Maughan (2002) outlined the creation of an assessment program based on these standards. The importance of collaboration with faculty also emerged as a qualification, as evidenced in the literature (Hinchliffe, 2003). The need to incorporate advancing technology into both teaching and learning was another important trend. The literature stresses the idea that new electronic learning environments, complete with new learning theories, necessitates the need for librarians to alter their role in library instruction. Indeed, librarians began to employ active learning techniques to aid "learners to truly understand electronic information sources" (Woodard, 2002, p. 43).

Like the professional literature, the job ads of the time reflected the incorporation of the ACRL standards into practice (Table 6). Almost 70% of the ads requested teaching experience, and over half (56%) acknowledged the need for interest or skills in providing library instruction. Concepts such as experience or familiarity with educational design, assessment, and collaboration spoke to the emphasis on the ACRL standards, as well as the growing expectations for higher-level pedagogical skills exemplified by the Immersion Program. The ads also displayed a marked increase in the requirements for knowledge and experience with emerging information technologies, as fully 63% of positions posted this requirement as opposed to only 6% in 1993. The 2000s also saw increased emphasis on the preparation of librarians as teachers, including increased demand for training in pedagogy.

Table 6- Required Teaching Qualifications for Instruction Positions in 2003

Job Requirement	Number of Ads Requesting Requirement	Percentage of Ads Requesting Requirement
Teaching Experience	11	69%
Experience with or Knowledge of Instructional Technology	10	63%
Possession of a general commitment and/or skill towards bibliographic instruction	9	56%
Knowledge or Experience with Educational Design	8	50%
Assessment of an Information Literacy Program	2	13%
Education in Instruction or User Education	2	13%
Teaching Collaboration	1	6%

2010s

While the major trends of the 2000s, such as assessment and campus collaboration, have persisted in the 2010s, Ariew (2014) sees continuing expansion of the teaching role on the

horizon, "requiring librarians to become collaboratively embedded into the curricula and to assume strong teaching roles" (p. 220). In many ways, the consolidation and expansion of the teaching role represent the successful fulfilment of the "repackaging" effort identified by O'Connor (2009a, p. 88). Teaching and all that it entails are now deep-seated components of academic librarianship and will continue to be for the foreseeable future. The annual *Reference Services Review* bibliography on library instruction and information literacy indicates that there are typically more than 500 publications per year on instructional issues in librarianship (Detmering, Johnson, Sproles, McClellan, & Linares, 2014). In recent years, large-scale studies on student research practices such as the Project Information Literacy studies (http://projectinfolit.org/) and the ERIAL (Ethnographic Research in Illinois Academic Libraries) Project (http://www.erialproject.org/) have underscored the need for information literacy instruction in the twenty-first-century classroom, while the drafting of the new ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (2015) has inspired conversations both practical and theoretical about the best way for librarians to move forward as educators (Ariew, 2014; Gibson & Jacobson, 2014; Schroeder, 2013). Meanwhile, some librarians have advocated for a more socially conscious, critical approach to information literacy that, according to Gregory and Higgins (2013), "takes into consideration the social, political, economic, and corporate systems that have power and influence over information production, dissemination, access, and consumption" (p. 4). The relationship between information literacy and emerging technologies remains strong, as evidenced by the increasingly significant role that many librarians are playing in the online and distance education arena (Nielsen, 2014).

The complexity and diversity of information literacy activities in the first half of the 2010s is mirrored in the job requirements for instruction positions in 2013 (Table 7). Evidence of

the widespread adoption of the ACRL *Information Competency Standards for Higher Education* into the profession is apparent with the emphasis on technology, pedagogy and assessment. The number of stated requirements of hiring institutions continues to increase, with a large majority of positions asking for teaching experience, experience with or knowledge of instructional technology, and possession of general commitment and/or skill with instruction. The percentage of ads that mention assessment-related requirements increased substantially, and, for the first time in the ads collected for this study, distance education makes an explicit appearance in a small number of ads. For new librarians interested in instruction, the message is clear. As an instruction librarian, you are expected to be a professional expert in education, with competencies across a wide range of areas.

Table 7- Required Teaching Qualifications for Instruction Positions in 2013

Job Requirement	Number of Ads Requesting Requirement	Percentage of Ads Requesting Requirement
Teaching Experience	65	89%
Experience with or Knowledge of Instructional Technology	61	84%
Possession of a general commitment and/or skill towards bibliographic instruction	56	77%
Knowledge or Experience with Educational Design	43	59%
Assessment of an Information Literacy Program	34	47%
Education in Instruction or User Education	24	33%
Coordination of an Information Literacy Program	7	10%
Teaching Collaboration	5	7%
Knowledge of Distance Education Instruction	3	4%

Conclusion

In the past 40 years, the concept of information literacy transformed from new concept to an accepted tenant of librarianship. As the concept of information literacy blossomed throughout the years, so did the number of job ads, the amount of requirements for the positions, and the percentage of ads that requested teaching-related requirements (Table 8). This trend demonstrates the application of theory to practice and the growing demand for librarians as teachers.

Table 2- Percentage of Selected Job Ad Requirements By Year
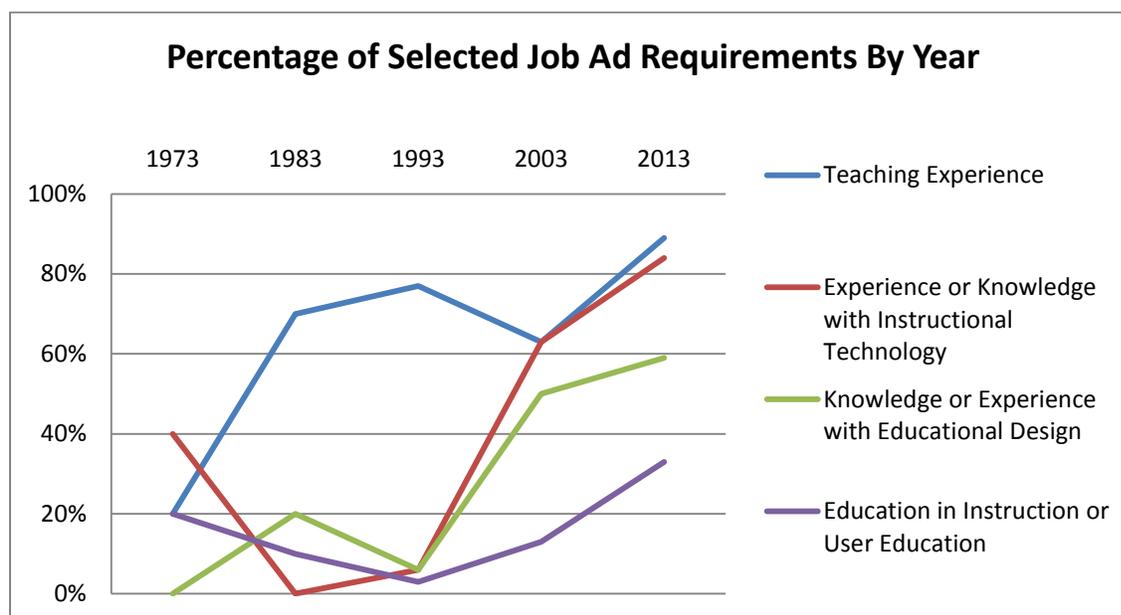
From a rhetorical perspective, these ads embody the ongoing process of situating librarians within campus communities as central experts in pedagogy. As O'Connor (2009a) has convincingly demonstrated, information literacy represents a "politically savvy approach to repackaging libraries' educational mission" (p. 88), but this "repackaging" has nevertheless contributed to a substantial increase in job expectations, especially in regard to the level and amount of expertise required. At the same time, the overlap in requirements between 1973 and 2013 suggests that librarians were interested, as many scholars have noted, in serving as

educators, well before the advent of the information literacy movement (Salony, 1995; Hopkins, 1982). Emergent technological trends in the library world, such as online instruction, maker spaces, digital humanities labs, and data curation, are expanding the purview of library instruction and transforming user expectations for the library. As a result, the training and pedagogy of library instruction will need to continually adapt and expand as it has in the past to new trends and technologies. Requirements and job duties for new information literacy focused positions will likely follow suit. As the profession continues to promote an educational emphasis and advance the information literacy agenda, we will need to consider not only how we are preparing new librarians for expert teaching roles but also how we can meet the challenges and capitalize on the opportunities inherent in the adoption of such roles.

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