Enhancing Undergraduate Student Learning
Jennifer Dorner and Elizabeth Dupuis
Version: March 31, 2008

Overview
As argued in several reports over the past decade, workers and citizens in the 21st century must be prepared to innovate, solve problems, think critically and creatively, and be lifelong learners. Recognizing this imperative, the academy seeks to prepare students with broad knowledge and transferable skills as a complement to in-depth understanding of disciplinary content. Higher education institutions have responded by articulating learning outcomes, by promoting curricular activities that actively engage students with the research community, and by emphasizing assessment and accountability measures. Once embedded in general education courses, essential learning outcomes – including information literacy, quantitative literacy, teamwork, civic engagement, intercultural knowledge, and ethical reasoning – are being integrated in required courses for majors. Universities aim to increase student engagement at all levels (with special focus on the first-year experience) and understand how students feel about their education (as measured through instruments like the National Survey of Student Engagement).

National Trends
Shifts in curricula and pedagogy at universities are mirrored by shifts in their libraries, whether through the provision of public services like chat reference, the development of library spaces that support collaborative learning, or the revision of the library instruction curriculum. Subject specialist librarians are developing documents that articulate research competencies for the disciplines and are working more closely with faculty to integrate those competencies into the curriculum. Increasingly instruction librarians are moving beyond the “one shot” course-related instruction session and freshman orientation to provide instruction through online instruction, co-developed and co-taught credit bearing courses within the disciplines, and collaboratively produced research assignments. In addition to support for formal learning paired with courses, college and university libraries also create a range of informal learning opportunities – such as through “one book” programs, exhibits, student conferences highlighting undergraduate research projects, and peer consulting – which contribute to developing the habits of mind of successful learners.

Local Context
The UC Berkeley Library offers library instruction sessions for courses on demand as faculty identify the need during a semester – collectively library staff taught 648 sessions to 15,672 students in this program in 2006/2007. Library instruction at Berkeley does not happen in a single course, but is incorporated throughout the lower-division and upper-division curricula such as Biology 1B, History 101, Reading and Composition courses, and courses fulfilling the American Cultures requirement. As a campus leader with the Mellon Library/Faculty Fellowship on Undergraduate Research grant, the Library paired librarians with individual faculty to design research-based assignments and implementation plans in advance of the semester they taught the course. This initiative offered one approach to addressing some of the barriers to truly integrating library skills and resources into a student’s education. Significant barriers remain – lack of coherent oversight in ensuring students develop skills for lifelong learning in addition to content knowledge, few prerequisites or foundational courses in departments, lack of acceptance from faculty that campus partners should share responsibility for supporting students educationally, and little academic preparation for librarians to assume roles as pedagogical peers. The Library must find ways to sustain the successful components from our experience and remove the barriers that remain.
As campus continues to develop its priorities for student learning, the Library must find ways to stay abreast of and support those priorities that complement our mission. The Library must continue to enhance the relationship with the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education and designated liaisons to academic support units (e.g., GSI Teaching and Resource Center, Graduate Division, New Student Services, Student Learning Center) but continue to explore new opportunities for collaboration with these units as well as those we have not partnered with yet. Informal learning experiences are supported through a variety of Library-sponsored programs such as the Unofficial Summer Reading List, Library Prize for Undergraduate Research, Free Speech Movement Educational Programs, Know Your Library drop-in workshops, online library tutorials, library exhibits, Lunch Poems, and other public events.

Starting Points

- Develop a librarian position focused on the first-year experience for new undergraduates. This position would lead the initiative to create an “introduction to research university,” re-envision orientation materials for new students (through traditional and new environments such as alternate reality games), and serve as liaison to all academic support units responsible for new student services.

- Collaborate with the new Dean of Undergraduate Division of the College of Letters and Science to integrate information literacy competencies and research-based activities in Freshman and Sophomore Seminars.

- Create a mechanism for recognizing and evaluating librarians and library staff contributions to teaching. In fall 2008 the Library will launch a Library Instructor Development program to provide a more structured environment for library staff to develop their knowledge and abilities related to teaching. A previous task force on this topic noted the need for Library Administration to find a way to recognize effective teaching during the library staff members’ reviews. Recommendations could come from a task force or Admin members. All AULs and Directors conducting evaluations must adopt the recommendations to ensure consistency across departments, recognize the importance of this component of library work, and signal the importance of professional development for ongoing improvement.

- Enhance the guidelines for library liaisons to academic departments to strengthen the expectations related to their educational role and support for student learning.

- Partner with Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Program (URAP) and other interested campus units to organize and sponsor an undergraduate research conference at Berkeley, where students have an opportunity to share their research findings with peers, campus members, and the community. Such events not only showcase undergraduate learning but also enhance students’ oral and written communication as well as research skills. Many peer research institutions host these events and can serve as models. Ideally the event will take place in the library.

- Pursue future grants from national organizations or foundations with a goal of building on lessons learned from the Mellon Library/Faculty Fellowship on Undergraduate Research and further enhancing campus’ understanding of the Library’s educational role (including individual faculty and campus administrators).
• Explore approaches for engaging students as readers through further development of new books displays in our libraries as well as through our web sites. Opportunities for enhancing the Unofficial Summer Reading List program and partnering with the College of Letters and Sciences “On the Same Page” program should be explored, perhaps by the Undergraduate Collections Librarian.

Supporting Documents

AACU’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP)
http://www.aacu.org/advocacy/leap/index.cfm

General Education in the 21st Century
http://repositories.cdlib.org/cshe/CSHE-7-07/

Library liaisons to academic departments
http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/Help/liaisons.html

Library liaisons to academic support units
http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/Help/liais_support.html

Mellon Library/Faculty Fellowship for Undergraduate Research
http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/mellon/

National Conferences on Undergraduate Research
http://www.ncur.org/

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)
http://nsse.iub.edu/html/quick_facts.cfm

Undergraduate Student Learning Initiative
http://education.berkeley.edu/usli.html

University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES)
http://ucues.berkeley.edu/home

NOTE: This issue relates to several other New Directions topics such as space for student needs, assessment, future library jobs, support for library staff, and promoting the library.