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Creating and Sustaining a Teaching Community: Discussing the Instruction Exchange at Northeastern University Library

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Creating and Sustaining a Teaching Community

*Discussing the Instruction Exchange at
Northeastern University Library*

ACRL New England Chapter & New England Library Instruction Group Conference 2022



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1.

How it started

December 2018-January 2020

Goals for the initial exchanges

- ▶ Encourage growth of teaching and sharing culture within Research & Instruction department
- ▶ Learn from others' successes and challenges
- ▶ Reduce duplication of effort by sharing lesson plans and teaching materials

Initial structure

- ▶ One hour-long department meeting a month was dedicated to the Exchange
- ▶ Colleagues could sign up to share about a teaching experience (25 minutes) or an instruction hack (10 minutes)

Community guidelines

- ▶ All contributions are valuable
- ▶ All participants should be given a chance to share or speak
- ▶ Listen respectfully and actively
- ▶ Offer suggestions, rather than commands
- ▶ Build on others' ideas rather than shutting them down

Guiding questions

- ▶ Instruction hack: what is it (tool, technology, organization system, etc.)? In which situations might it be helpful? What should other instructors know about this hack?

Guiding questions

- ▶ Instruction experience:
 - Background - Describe the context and learners; do you have instructional materials to share?
 - Reflection - What were your goals for the session? What went well? What would you change?
 - Looking ahead - Is there a particular aspect of the experience you would like to discuss with the group or receive input on? What suggestions would you give to another library instructor who wanted to adapt your lesson?

Example topics

▶ Instruction Hacks

- Slack
- Backward design
- Using Banner for outreach
- Curriculum mapping
- Adobe Spark
- Libwizard vs. Rise

Teaching shares

- ▶ First year engineering workshops
- ▶ Adapting instruction for English Language Learners
- ▶ Citation management webinars
- ▶ Pop-up courses
- ▶ Librarian role in the LMS
- ▶ Teaching with Archives



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How it grew

February 2020-August 2020

Creating a complimentary digital space

- ▶ Microsoft Teams space
 - Shared files space for meeting agendas, presentation and teaching materials
 - Chat channel for instruction-related questions and conversations
 - Teaching tools notebook

Initial online exchanges

- ▶ Review community guidelines
- ▶ Breakout groups
- ▶ Discussion questions
 - What requests are you seeing for teaching now that all classes are running online?
 - Have you been getting requests for live virtual sessions? Recorded tutorials? Something else?
 - Are there certain situations in which you think one would work better than the other? What experiences with each can you share with your group?

Example discussion topics

- ▶ Active learning
- ▶ Workshops
- ▶ Online teaching tools
- ▶ Citation tracking
- ▶ Learning analytics
- ▶ Google & commercial search engines



3.

Currently

August 2020 - Now

Shifting the tone during the pandemic

- ▶ Transition in leadership
- ▶ Assessing new spirit of needs in our cohort
- ▶ Determining the balance between need for community and need for bandwidth
- ▶ Asking how to best meet and build community while offering a low stress (yet edifying) space
 - Transitions to remote work (in perpetuity?)
 - Shifts in teaching approaches
 - New skills/tools being learned on the fly

Responsive meeting formats

Every month we considered which meeting format to choose for the month based on member interest, assessment of group morale, and consideration of time of year and staff bandwidth for different engagement levels

- ▶ Tool Demonstration
- ▶ Class Demonstration
- ▶ Open Discussion on a topic
- ▶ Collective Check-In

Choosing responsive formats

▶ **Tool Demonstration**

- With time for exploration
 - Best for when people have energy, but need dedicated time to explore
- For listening
 - Best for when people want to sit back & learn

▶ **Class Demonstration**

- Best for when people are stressed and need to sit back and learn

▶ **Open Discussion on a topic**

- Best for when people have energy and want to connect and collaborate

▶ **Collective Check-In**

- Best for when people need to connect as colleagues, and not necessarily just about their work

Instruction exchange topics

Instruction Exchange Monthly Meeting Topics, Northeastern University Library & Archives

2022 ACRL New England Chapter (ACRL/NEC) & New England
Library Instruction Group Conference

Molly Brown, Lindley Homol, and Regina Pagani

May 2022

Since this month marks the end of the spring semester and the start of summer 1 session, we used this gathering to surface summer teaching-related plans for the sake of update sharing and to illuminate possible ways we might connect with each other. Going around the Zoom room, we asked our colleagues to share out based on the below guiding questions:

- What teaching activities, projects, or skills are you planning to work on this summer?
- Are there any projects you'd welcome collaboration on?
- How can the Instruction Exchange space support you in any of these endeavors?

April 2022

For our first hybrid gathering of the instruction exchange (some colleagues joining in person and others joining via Zoom), we facilitated a zine-making workshop in which we

<https://bit.ly/IEtopics>

Formal assessment

Instruction Exchange Feedback & Visioning

The Instruction Exchange facilitators (Lindley, Molly, and Regina) welcome your suggestions for future Instruction Exchanges! Your input ensures that this monthly space responds to the teaching and learning needs of the library's teaching partners, and that it highlights the teaching work we are already doing.

Feel welcome to answer as many questions as you'd like - none are required, but all answers are appreciated.

If you feel more comfortable sharing your thoughts in person or over email, please feel welcome to reach out to one or all of us directly: Molly Brown (mo.brown@northeastern.edu); Lindley Homol (L.homol@northeastern.edu); Regina Paganl (r.paganl@northeastern.edu).

Thank you in advance for your time!

...

1. What have you liked or found most beneficial about the Instruction Exchange so far?

Enter your answer

2. What suggestions to you have for changes or improvements to the Instruction Exchange?

Enter your answer

3. What topics, questions, tools, etc. would you like to see covered in an Instruction Exchange?

Enter your answer

4. Are there any topics, tools, teaching examples, strategies, etc. that you yourself would like to share or facilitate in an Instruction Exchange?

Enter your answer

5. General feedback, suggestions, questions:

Enter your answer

Submit

Never give out your password. [Report abuse](#)

Informal assessment

- ▶ During Instruction Exchange
 - Does everyone speak up or contribute in some form?
 - What is the energy of the share out or exchange?
 - How is the topic of discussion resonating?
- ▶ Outside of Instruction Exchange
 - How is IE discussed in other parts of the library?
 - How are meeting topics carried forward in praxis?
 - What new bridges, connections, collaborations emerged between library colleagues?

A note on labor

- ▶ The heavy lift of facilitation
- ▶ The maintenance and sustaining work
 - Note taking
 - Emails before and after
 - Managing assessment
 - Regular and prioritized reflection (especially immediately after the exchange)
- ▶ Collegial availability outside of the exchange
 - Connecting with colleagues about visions, ideas, excitements outside of regular meetings

Onboarding new members

- ▶ Deliberately designing how new hires, new teaching collaborators are brought in
 - Non Research and Instruction (R&I) members brought in (May 2020)
 - Most new membership from R&I
- ▶ New members arrive as collaborators and meet fellow collaborators in a specific and useful context

Fitting into the web of teaching & learning

- ▶ This community exists in a network of other groups: Teaching with Archives, Online Learning, First Year Experience, Recording Studios, etc.
- ▶ IE is scoped to suit connection and collaboration, not necessarily project management or objective completion
 - This group doesn't need to report upward or accomplish departmental goals, but it can!
 - Can map to individual or library-wide initiatives, but can also be responsive to curiosity or imagination instead

Future directions

- ▶ New directions are designed in short turn around by the needs of the members or activity in the library
- ▶ This is designed to be sustained and maintained, not necessarily consistent design
- ▶ Strong reliance on informal and formal assessment to shape any new directions taken

Lessons learned

- ▶ People are open to flexible agendas and flexible long-term planning (as long as it transparent and regularly assessed)
- ▶ Co-facilitation is essential to the spirit of the exchange, modeling horizontal mentorship
- ▶ Navigating supervisory power dynamics on a case-by-case basis is an important part of participants feeling comfortable sharing out
- ▶ Encouraging sharing takes different forms
- ▶ It's ok to take breaks! Hit pause if needed!

Advice for adapting/building

- ▶ Build with the scale of your institution in mind—but be creative about who your teaching collaborators might be! (They may be beyond your department or institution)
 - Choose what meeting cadence works best for you
 - Consider busy times/more flexible times in year
- ▶ Prioritize what's helpful and energizing to discuss to avoid frustration and unnecessary road blocks
- ▶ Arrive at this space with flexibility and generosity to yourself and your colleagues



Questions?

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