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Institutional Literacy and Libraries: Addressing Library Anxiety with a Personal Librarian Program
L'alphabétisation institutionnelle et les bibliothèques : répondre à l'anxiété des bibliothèques grâce à un programme de bibliothécaire personnel

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Citer cet article

Résumé de l'article

Cet article considère l'alphabétisation institutionnelle comme lentille par laquelle il est possible d'examiner les causes de l'anxiété des bibliothèques et le développement des programmes de bibliothèques. L'alphabétisation institutionnelle constitue la capacité à lire et à s'engager dans les façons d'être et de faire qui sont intégrées, souvent de façon imperceptible, dans les institutions de toutes sortes. Cet article affirme que la capacité des utilisateurs de bibliothèques à s'engager avec confiance dans les services de bibliothèque dépend en partie du niveau d'alphabétisation institutionnelle de ces utilisateurs, à la fois dans l'institution de la bibliothèque elle-même et dans toute institution hôte plus grande - telle qu'une université.

Un environnement comme celui d'une université nécessite une variété de compétences et ceux qui développent des programmes et des services dans de tels milieux ne doivent pas prendre pour acquis que les nouveaux usagers potentiels de la bibliothèque ont déjà développé ces compétences. Quoique les bibliothécaires sont habitués à considérer la maîtrise de l'information comme étant leur contribution à cette réalité, des pratiques d'alphabétisation institutionnelle peu familières peuvent présenter des obstacles permettant aux nouveaux usagers de la bibliothèque d'accroître leurs compétences informationnelles.

Une comparaison de la recherche sur les effets du manque d'alphabétisation institutionnelle et de la recherche sur l'anxiété des bibliothèques montre des parallèles qui suggèrent que de faibles taux d'alphabétisation institutionnelle sont un facteur contribuant à l'anxiété des bibliothèques, créant alors l'une des obstacles susmentionnés. Agir en tant que médiateur de l'alphabétisation institutionnelle est une façon pour le personnel des bibliothèques de relever ce défi. L'article termine en décrivant comment l'objectif théorique ainsi développé a été utilisé pour informer le développement du programme de bibliothécaire personnel à la University of Regina, en partie en positionnant les bibliothécaires comme médiateurs de l'alphabétisation institutionnelle.

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Abstract

This article considers institutional literacy as a lens through which to consider causes of library anxiety and the development of library programs. Institutional literacy is the ability to read and engage with the ways of being and doing that are—often invisibly—embedded into institutions of all kinds. This article posits that the ability of library users to confidently engage with library services is in part predicated on the level of institutional literacy these users have, both in the institution of the library itself and any larger host institution—such as a university.

A setting such as a university requires a range of literacies, and those developing programs and services in such settings should not assume new and potential library users already have developed these literacies. While librarians are accustomed to considering information literacy as their contribution to this matrix, unfamiliar institutional literacy practices can present obstacles to new library users becoming information literate.

A comparison of research on the effects of a lack of institutional literacy and research into library anxiety demonstrates parallels that suggest that low levels of institutional literacy are a contributing factor to library anxiety, creating one of the aforementioned

obstacles. Acting as institutional literacy mediators is one way library workers can respond to this challenge. The article concludes with a description of how the theoretical lens thus developed was used to inform the development of a personal librarian program at the University of Regina, in part by positioning librarians as institutional literacy mediators.

Cet article considère l'alphabétisation institutionnelle comme lentille par laquelle il est possible d'examiner les causes de l'anxiété des bibliothèques et le développement des programmes de bibliothèques. L'alphabétisation institutionnelle constitue la capacité à lire et à s'engager dans les façons d'être et de faire qui sont intégrées, souvent de façon imperceptible, dans les institutions de toutes sortes. Cet article affirme que la capacité des utilisateurs de bibliothèques à s'engager avec confiance dans les services de bibliothèque dépend en partie du niveau d'alphabétisation institutionnelle de ces utilisateurs, à la fois dans l'institution de la bibliothèque elle-même et dans toute institution hôte plus grande - telle qu'une université.

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Keywords

institutional literacy, library anxiety, personal librarian, outreach, engagement

alphabétisation institutionnelle, anxiété des bibliothèques, bibliothécaire personnel, sensibilization, engagement

Introduction

The communities, schools, and workplaces that our libraries serve are full of potential library users, but we know that some will never make the transition from potential to

actual library users (Vondracek, 2007; Miller & Murillo, 2012). Many reasons have been posited to explain why people would not take advantage of services and resources that would be to their advantage. The underutilization of libraries by those they intend to serve continues to be a challenge for many kinds of libraries.

This article will consider institutional literacy as a lens for examining this challenge in the context of academic libraries, while keeping all kinds of libraries in view. Through a review of selected literature from several disciplines, it explores how researchers have developed and applied the concept of institutional literacy in various settings. By proposing that a lack of institutional literacy likely contributes to the experience of library anxiety, this article uses these concepts as a theoretical perspective to describe the development of a personal librarian program at the University of Regina.

Institutional Literacy and Library Users

"Institutional literacy" is a term used to describe practices that are "promoted, supported and structured by dominant institutions" (Iorio, 2016, p. 167). Institutional literacy practices often separate—intentionally or unintentionally—insiders and outsiders of various domains, such as academic disciplines, formal institutions, law, religion, and other kinds of organizations, professions, and social groupings. Those on the inside are literate in a set of actions, vocabulary, ways of communicating, and other practices that govern how things are done and what is commonly understood or accepted by the group or institution. Those on the outside lack this knowledge, sometimes without realizing it.

Most incoming college and university students are "outsiders" to the academy in this regard, even though they are now enrolled at the institution. The places, people, and practices at post-secondary institutions are new and often not intuitive to these students. This deficit in institutional literacy can be a barrier to students taking advantage of resources and services, including those offered by libraries. New employees who are potential users of a special library, or members of the public who might benefit from the services of their local public library may also experience similar feelings of unfamiliarity.

Drawing on the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, Susanne Weber (2013) explored how Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* works within the academy to reinforce institutional literacy practices. Very similar to the description of institutional literacy provided above, *habitus* is a set of ingrained dispositions and ways of being and doing that are generally invisible to the person. Our *habitus* generally appears to us as simply common sense or what comes naturally ("Habitus," 2008). Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, p. 54) asserted that every institutionalized educational system has its structures and functions because those structures and functions are necessary to produce and reproduce the conditions necessary for it to be a self-replicating system with the power (what sociologists call a "cultural arbitrary") to bring members under the influence of the institution.

Weber noted that academia is a socializing context. Students at all levels (even young academics) either learn or do not learn the expected behaviour. To become a good

student or academic involves a gradual, often unnoticed, transformation of the original *habitus* as the system of rules enters the body and forms an embodied structure of the institution (Weber, 2013, p. 173).

What Weber described using Bordieu's language of *habitus* is the challenge of any newcomer to an unfamiliar institution or organization. For example, if you show up at a religious service in a tradition you are not familiar with, you will probably observe words and actions that clearly have significance and meaning to the participants but that will give you the acute sense of being an outsider. Similarly, if you spend time at a law office without a relevant background, you will observe significant words and actions that might make you feel confused or excluded. This is the experience of the person who enters a new institution without being literate in the institution's *habitus*. How many of our new students, or members of the communities we serve, have this experience when they enter our libraries?

Sometimes institutions or professions intentionally attempt to separate insiders and outsiders. But often (as is hopefully the case with libraries) the separation develops unintentionally as a by-product of institutional evolution over time. The practices shaped by the institutional *habitus* are seldom part of a nefarious scheme, but all human groups and institutions necessarily develop internal coherence in order to ensure continued existence. This development produces the practices that those joining or interacting with a group or institution must learn.

Institutional Literacy Among Literacies

Students transitioning into a post-secondary educational context face a complex system that involves several different literacies. In proposing a "multiliteracies framework" for university student success, Miller and Schultz (2014) asserted that students need to gain competency in a range of literacies that allow for participation in overlapping literacy contexts. They contend that no single literacy suffices in simultaneously navigating the university, subject area, and world at large. Rather, students need multiple literacies in order to successfully participate in these overlapping contexts (Miller & Schulz, 2014, p. 78).

Miller and Schulz focus on four fundamental types of literacy: academic literacy (producing academic texts), traditional literacy (reading, writing, grammar), critical literacy (reading and critiquing texts), and institutional literacy (reading the institution). These literacies overlap and build on each other, with the terminology used differently by various authors (see Badke, 2002, who contrasted information literacy with academic literacy but who advanced some parallels to the argument being made here). Users and potential users of libraries in other kinds of institutions and communities also need to develop a similar range of literacies in order to accomplish their goals; one of these is becoming literate in the institution of the library.

Students do not come to university lacking institutional literacy. They are already literate in a range of institutions: their families, local communities, sports teams, and online gaming communities, for example. However, for many students—particularly those from

historically underrepresented communities and first-generation university students—these usually don't include the literacies that are assumed within academic institutions.

Each library has its own context in which users face the need to be institutionally literate, and each library's users will have their own challenges. New students are unfamiliar with university structures: who has formal authority, who has informal authority, when it is acceptable to ask questions, and who can be challenged or not. Their high school library was perhaps a 4,000-square-foot room with a few computers and old encyclopedia sets, and now a multi-floor building stands in front of them full of service points, computer labs, various physical collections, maker spaces, and sometimes hard-to-find offices where librarians work on their behalf.

Some of the users that libraries seek to serve are better prepared than others for this contextual change. Some spent much of their childhood in their public library and have continued to use library services into adulthood. They enter any library doors now with a relatively high level of literacy regarding the public library institution. However, others either didn't have or didn't seize the opportunity to use library services in the past; sometimes this is a result of societal inequalities. Indeed "the feeling of fitting into academia (or not), the feeling of belonging (or not)—even the feeling of being able (or not) to enter the socially and culturally rarefied space of a university building or a library will be a pertinent (but mostly forgotten) dimension of inequality" (Weber, 2013, p. 175). Papen and Thériault (2016, p. 186) concurred by noting the role of institutional literacies as a barrier, particularly for people from unprivileged backgrounds.

Building Institutional Literacy

Regular library users will, over time, generally increase in their institutional literacy. How do they get there? Do librarians intentionally aim to build institutional literacy through library programs and services? Or are library users generally left to learn this on their own?

Linda Thies (2012) noted that post-secondary students face the challenge of being expected to employ different literacy practices while also alternating between the ways of thinking and writing in multiple disciplines. It often appears that students are expected to learn all of this by osmosis. How much of the institutional literacy that helps our patrons make better use of our libraries is left to osmosis?

Library users probably won't be able to articulate a lack of institutional literacy (at least using that term), but they are aware that they don't seem to fit in, they don't know where to go for support, they experience rising anxiety, or they feel isolated. Rather than turning to the programs, services, and people that have been put in place to help them at the library, students often turn to their friends, neighbors, or classmates who may be on the same learning curve (see Miller & Murillo, 2012). One result of this is that students may experience library anxiety.

Constance Mellon pioneered research into library anxiety (1986), and a range of literature has emerged over the past three decades addressing this phenomenon.

Library anxiety was examined by McPherson (2015), who found both personal and institutional factors as causes among undergraduate students. Shelmerdine (2018) explored the work of Carl Rogers on invitational theory as a lens through which to consider library anxiety and concluded that librarianship has close parallels with the helping professions. A study by Fraser and Bartlett (2018) examined racial differences in library anxiety in a Canadian context. Their study found that while Caucasian students entered university with higher levels of library anxiety than African Nova Scotians, library anxiety increased for African Nova Scotians throughout their degree, particularly as they encountered barriers. They pointed to programs that target students individually (such as mentorship) as one way to address the experience of library anxiety. In a literature review on psychosocial reasons why students don't go to librarians for help, Black (2016) considered library anxiety within a mix of other factors and concluded that cognitive, social, and emotional factors need to be addressed. A review of earlier literature on library anxiety by Carlile (2007) found that students' perception of academic libraries as intimidating leads to library anxiety. Underlying causes of this intimidation included: general phobia of or hatred for libraries, feelings of inadequacy or bewilderment, the overwhelming size of university libraries, and a confusing or unfamiliar layout. Finally, the literature pointed to anxiety over library-related tasks such as information searching or the general research process (Carlile, 2007, p. 133–34).

These causes of library anxiety should not be surprising if we assume that the institutional literacy of new library users is underdeveloped. Feelings of inadequacy, bewilderment, being overwhelmed by the size of libraries, and finding library layouts confusing or unfamiliar all sound like experiences one would expect someone to have without relevant institutional literacy. Thus, there may be a link between institutional literacy and a number of the demonstrated causes of library anxiety.

Miller and Schulz observed that university settings and systems rely on many insider practices that leave students feeling not just confused but also alienated or intimidated (2014, p. 80). It is no surprise, then, that Carlile concluded "affective barriers … such as lack of confidence and fear of asking for help—can, in turn, become a source of heightened levels of anxiety when a student is confronted with having to use the library's resources, equipment and services" (2007, p. 135). This pattern is likely not unique to post-secondary students using academic libraries; non-academic library users could also experience a similar lack of confidence rooted in unfamiliarity with the discourses and practices of the libraries and institutions within which those libraries are situated.

The research of Papen and Thériault (2016) into institutional literacy and young people doesn't specifically address libraries. However, their argument supports a connection between a lack of institutional literacy and library anxiety. They pointed to examples showing that lack of familiarity with institutional literacy practices easily provokes feelings of powerlessness. As an example, they turned to Jones (2014, p. 64), who observed people being "rendered passive by bureaucratic text." This can be exacerbated when such feelings have been confirmed by years of living in precarity or with mental health issues (Papen & Thériault, 2016, p. 190).

One approach adopted by some libraries to address obstacles to student engagement with libraries and librarians is personal librarian programs (PLPs). An early example of such a program described by Spak and Glover (2007) outlined the growth of their PLP in a medical library setting, concluding that librarians were able to establish connections with students that would have been very difficult to attain otherwise. Henry, Vardeman, and Syma (2012) reported a sharp increase in one-on-one consultations with librarians at a large research university following the launch of a PLP that connected students with their subject librarian. A number of PLPs have targeted specific groups of students: Melançon and Goebel (2016) engaged Aboriginal students; Lafrance and Kealy (2017) described a PLP aimed at transfer students; Ziegler (2017) reported on the use of a PLP to reach online learners; and England, Lo, and Breaux (2018) provided a case study of a PLP for doctoral students.

Given all of this, how do we assist library users who may not have the institutional literacy—and the confidence that comes with it—to access the supports, resources, and services they need because library anxiety holds them back? Researchers in fields as varied as literacy studies, museum studies, and healthcare have examined the role of the literacy mediator (or literacy broker) as the human link that bridges these gaps (see Papen, 2010; Edwards et al., 2013; Yasukawa et al., 2013). Papen also asserted that increasing levels of education have not eliminated the need for mediators, but that the resulting frequent changes in language and literacy demands mean literacy mediators remain an important compliment to an individual's own literacy (2010, p. 79).

The field known as New Literacy Studies (NLS) uses the term "literacy mediators" to describe people who read and write for somebody else. NLS conceptualises literacy as a social practice: activities that are patterned not only by individual skills but by cultural norms and social relations. This provides a counter-discourse to the view of literacies as individual skills. Looking beyond the individual and into the larger context of when and how literacy is used in social life makes it easy to recognize the role of others in accomplishing acts of reading and writing (Papen, 2010). In the case of librarians, we may not just read and write texts for our users; we may also "read" institutions and recommend institutionally relevant practices for our users to employ, whether individually or in groups. Library workers may sometimes think of themselves as individuals assisting individual library users. However, NLS pushes us to think of ourselves as embedded in a larger institution that interacts with people who also are embedded in their own communities.

Responding With a Personal Librarian Program

If a lack of institutional literacy is a contributing factor to library anxiety and other obstacles to users or potential users taking advantage of library services and supports, how can librarians respond? Rather than see this as one problem needing its own dedicated set of programs or initiatives, it might be better to see this as one consideration brought into the design and implementation of all library programs. The ways this consideration is applied will be unique to each setting, based on local institutional practices and the types and locations of support already in place at a particular library or parent institution.

Background

Following is one specific example of how this consideration was (and continues to be) applied in the development of a library program at the University of Regina. The University of Regina is a comprehensive mid-sized university enrolling just over 16,000 students annually. Among enrolled students, 13% self-identify as Indigenous and 19% of students arriving in the fall of 2019 came from outside Canada. A personal librarian program was launched as a pilot project in the fall of 2018, aimed at supporting new students over the course of their first two semesters of study. While the goals of this program go beyond addressing a lack of institutional literacy among new students, what follows is a description of how considering the institutional literacy challenge helped inform program development.

The personal librarian program pairs incoming students with a particular librarian designated as their "personal librarian." Students receive a series of six email messages from their personal librarian during their first two semesters of study (PLP messages). These PLP messages each contain a personal greeting from the librarian, a photo of the librarian in their office (in most cases depicting them helping a student), and information about library services as well as other relevant supports on campus (PLP messages 1 and 3 can be found in Appendix 1, and message 2 is included below as an illustration. These three messages comprise the complete series received by students in their first semester of study).

Program Design

During the pilot phase of the program, only incoming students who self-identified as First Nations, Inuit, or Métis on their application to the university were included. This group was chosen as part of efforts to support the University's strategic plan, elements of which focused on enhancing services and academic supports for Aboriginal students. At the University of Regina this represented about 260 new students for the fall 2018 semester and another 70 for the winter 2019 semester. Seven of the fourteen in-scope librarians at the University library, plus two staff members from the University's federated college libraries, participated in the first year of the program.

The program aims to reduce library anxiety and other obstacles that prevent students from accessing library resources and services. It does this by positioning librarians as institutional-literacy mediators. The literacy mediator acts as a guide who can provide advice, direction, translation of academic jargon, empathy, and any other needed explanation to the student who has thus far been an "outsider" to the academic institution. By bolstering the institutional literacy of students, their awareness of and confidence to engage with library resources and services should increase.

The personal librarian program accomplishes this positioning in several ways. One is personal touch. Rather than the library being a big building on campus full of strangers who are just part of the larger impersonal institution that the student is coming to as an outsider, the student now has the face and name of a person who offers direct personal

support. This person-to-person contact is part of establishing the intended mediating relationship.

Making library outreach about people and not just resources is highlighted by Bell (2009), who shared his thoughts after hearing a talk by Seth Godin on humanizing the library—making it about library workers and not just about resources and technology, thus laying the foundation for relationships. There is a difference between offering potential library users a person and offering them a building, service point, or program. The former is a gateway to the latter.

Aligning with this focus on people-oriented aspects of outreach, the PLP messages include personal notes. These acknowledge the fact that university can be a strange place and that it takes time to learn about available supports and the "hows and whys" of academic life. Through these messages, the librarians position themselves as helpers who themselves made the same journey of adjusting to academic life and, in some ways, are still on that journey. Normalizing the disorientation and anxiety that a lack of institutional literacy can produce should help alleviate the feelings of isolation and being the only one who doesn't "get it."

Image 1 shows a portion of one of the PLP messages sent in the fall of 2018. The message introduction is positioned on the left, framing the message and offering personal contact. The text in the right-hand column aims to introduce the librarian as an institutional-literacy mediator.

Hello again {first name},

I hope you have enjoyed your first couple of months here at the University of Regina and that your studies are going well. I would like to make sure you know about some of the helpful resources available to you at the library. I have highlighted three of these below. I would be happy to meet with you if you have any questions about these, or other library services. You can contact me at brad.doerksen@uregina.ca or 306-337-2927. Or you can always drop by the help desk any time the library is open.

All the best,
Brad Doerksen
Student Success Librarian

Have you noticed that sometimes university is a strange place? People here have their own way of doing things and often seem to be speaking a different language. For the last 18 years my personal goal has been to help new college and university students make sense of this strange new world you have entered.

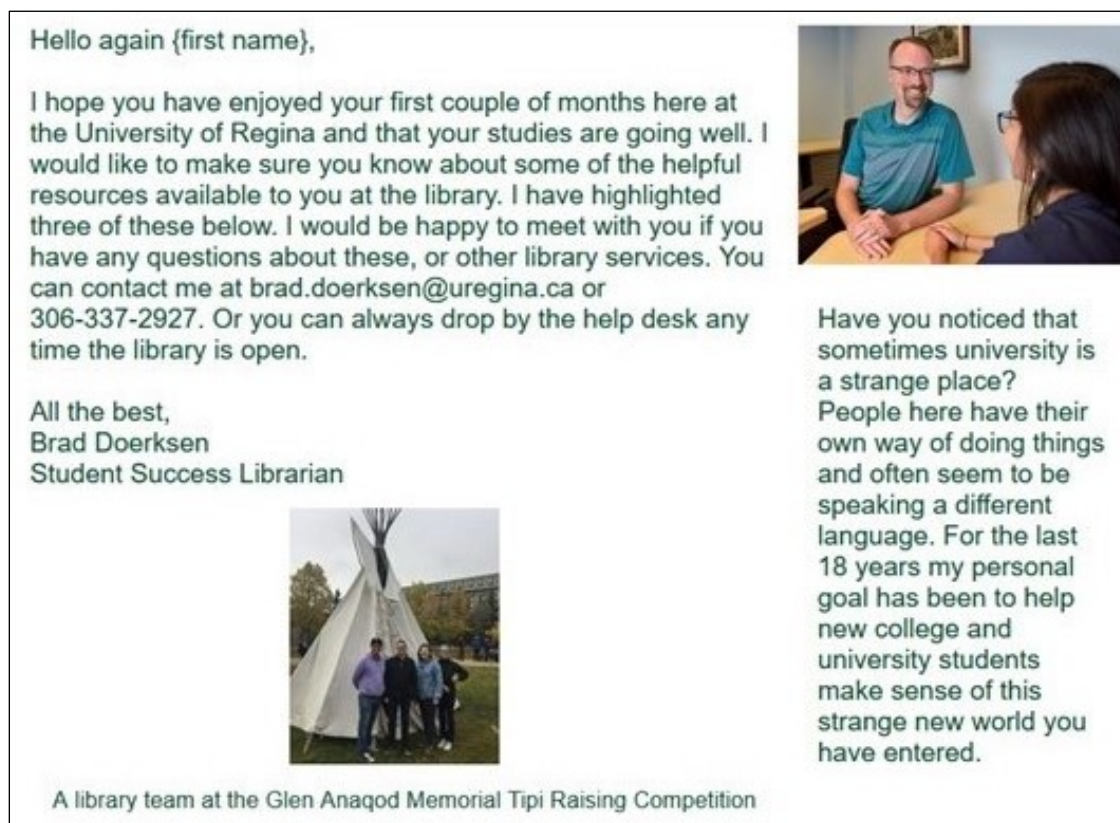A library team at the Glen Anaqod Memorial Tipi Raising Competition

Figure 1. Screenshot of a portion of one of the messages.

The remaining PLP message content also acts in a mediating way. By informing students about various resources available to them, this basic awareness improves their understanding of the ins and outs of student supports and academic resources on campus or online. Simply improving student knowledge of the library and other supports moves them towards an increased institutional literacy by providing some basic building blocks for their engagement in life as post-secondary students.

At its most basic level, a personal librarian program is just another means of getting information about the library in front of students—one more communication tool along with posters, brochures, website, social media, and orientation sessions. As noted above, helping library users increase their institutional literacy need not be its own program. However, it should be considered as a potential part of any new library program. Thus, the program at the University of Regina has sought to not just provide basic information about the library, but to offer individual librarians as institutional-literacy mediators.

Program Implementation

The Student Success Librarian, who led the development of the PLP messages, prepared a consistent structure across all the messages. Each message contained a brief introduction that framed the message, a short personal note (e.g., bio, favourite quote), and two or three information items. The introduction and personal note were customized by each participating librarian, while the information items were standard across the messages of all librarians. In choosing what information items would be included, the staff in the University's Aboriginal Student Centre (since renamed ta-tawâw Student Centre) were consulted to determine both library and wider campus resources and programs that incoming students might not be aware of but would benefit from.

Once a master template for each of the six PLP messages had been developed, the Templates for each of the six PLP messages were circulated to participating librarians for editing, while the Student Success Librarian worked with the registrar's office to generate lists of students by their home faculty and assign these students to their personal librarians (taking faculty liaison assignments into account). The messages were prepared and sent on a planned schedule through Constant Contact, a cloud-based email marketing tool. At the start of the second semester, students from the previous group who had not registered for courses in that semester were removed from the recipient lists, while a new cycle of messages was started for those entering university in the winter semester.

Beyond the content of the PLP messages, the program also seeks to leverage the concept of mere exposure. While osmosis may not be the best strategy for teaching various literacies, simply being exposed to something repeatedly can help improve a person's attitude toward that thing (Zajonc, 1968). Even if students do not immediately act upon the messages they receive, by regularly receiving a personal message from someone in the library, the library is transformed from the unfamiliar to the familiar. The messages, especially when combined with other outreach initiatives, help to create a

sort of brand recognition. Some elements are repeated in multiple messages in order to accomplish this. For example, all six messages contain the same photo of the librarian, and two messages encourage students to drop by the library help desk. Thus, the mere exposure provided by the messages reinforces the library and a particular librarian as resources the student can turn to when faced with obstacles in their education.

In their article on launching a personal librarian program at the University of Alberta, Melançon and Goebel (2016, p. 189) echoed these ideas. They asserted that a personal librarian program can reorient students by providing bearings and modeling behaviour in the physical and virtual spaces of the library, because the librarians have a relationship with the students. The importance of relationships with librarians in addressing library anxiety was also highlighted by Shelmerdine (2018). This might simply be a relationship of sending and reading emails, but even that can be the starting point for a new student trying to find their way.

Challenges and Outcomes

Because the PLP is based on push communication, and most students who read the messages don't reply to them, it is difficult to measure the full impact of the program. Constant Contact tracks how many recipients open a message and how many times a link included in a message is clicked. But it is unknown how often students simply act on the information provided—for example, coming to the library and asking a question at the help desk.

From an institutional literacy perspective, the ideal outcome would be establishing an ongoing literacy mediation relationship by way of regular interaction between a student and their personal librarian. However, this is not the typical outcome of any library program (nor would this level of interaction with every student be a manageable workload). This is why the PLP messages attempt to include not just typical library information, but also messaging to normalize the feelings that can come with a new institutional setting; in this way, simply reading messages might accomplish some of the institutional-literacy goals of the program.

Getting student feedback about the program has also been challenging. A short survey was developed and distributed in the final PLP message. Only four students completed the survey in the first cycle of the program—a sample too small to substantively contribute to potential changes to the message content. One factor possibly contributing to the low response rate is that the final message was sent late in the semester, just before many students take a break for the spring/summer; their overall level of engagement may be waning in anticipation of the break. On the next cycle of the program, plans are to link to the survey in the fifth, rather than the sixth, message to mitigate this potentiality. Also, rather than the modest prizes offered for completing the survey the first time, more attractive awards will be presented as an incentive.

The lack of survey responses has left email open rates as the primary measurement of program engagement. For the first cycle of the program during the fall and winter semesters of the 2018–19 academic year, 65.6% (n=960) of all messages were

opened. Like the books and articles our circulation statistics count, we cannot know how carefully these messages were read, but students did have library information on a screen they were looking at 960 times. Engagement was highest on the first message, when 78.9% (n=209) of students opened the email. Somewhat predictably, engagement dropped as time went by, to a low of 53.8% (n=114) of recipients opening the final message. It is hard to draw firm conclusions from email-open rates, but it is encouraging that over half of recipients opened all six messages across a span of seven months. Only one student used the unsubscribe button over the course of the six messages, so they were generally not treated like spam.

Also of note regarding email-open rates is that of the 209 students who opened the first message, 186 opened the second message. This means that 89% of those who opened the first message thought it was worth opening the second (which had a 70.2% overall open rate).

Each PLP message also has buttons and/or images that are clickable links. These links proved somewhat unpopular, as several messages garnered no link clicks, and the highest level of clicks was in a message from which 6% of students followed a link. The most popular link was the library's group study room booking page, with six students following it. This means that even the most popular link only attracted the attention of 2.4% of students who opened that message. Other links that attracted more than two clicks include: the librarians' personal contact information on the library website, the Criterion Collection, the library homepage, and the library's discovery service. Links that did not attract even a single click include: the Aboriginal Student Centre's events calendar, the campus security webpage, the laptop/tablet lending policy, the library's chat service, and the full listing of research guides by subject. As the program continues, a larger pool of data on clicked links should give an indication of what information is of greater interest to students. This will inform future revisions to message content.

Future Considerations

Given the very low time investment of the participating librarians and the manageable time demands on the librarian managing the program, the overall level of response has been deemed sufficient to continue the program.

The two-year pilot stage focused on a specific cohort of students. Since the program can easily scale up without a considerable increase in work by participating librarians, targeting additional groups is under consideration as the second year of the program draws to a close. The program initially had new undergraduates in view. In the second cycle of the program (started fall 2019), new self-declared Indigenous graduate students were included in this first stage of program expansion. Given the University of Regina's focus on internationalization and its relatively large international student population (19%), expansion to include international students is one other possibility being examined.

Anecdotal feedback and general writing-for-the-web guidelines suggested the initial PLP messages were a little long. For the second year of the pilot phase some of the messages were shortened in response to this concern. The creation of short videos where librarians introduce themselves, which would be linked to from the first message, is also being considered as a way of diversifying format away from just text and fixed images.

Increased assessment of the program will be helpful in validating the program's impact and giving shape to future revisions of both PLP message content and length. Student focus groups, continued use of a survey (with increased incentives), and continued consultation with campus stakeholders are among assessment initiatives being pursued.

Another very different type of future consideration is to continue examining the insider/outsider dynamic. It is important to note that the institutional-literacy mediator (personal librarian in this case) can simply function to reinforce the status quo by helping students transition from outsiders to insiders. As such, they could be seen as agents of assimilation, incorporating new students into the *habitus* of the academy in its current state.

However, there is a role for literacy mediators of all types to also act to reform, challenge, or even subvert the systems they are mediating. In the context of the Canadian academy and library programs for Indigenous students, this means learning about the history of interaction between universities and indigenous peoples, particularly when developing programs that reach out to those students. It also means finding ways to engage in efforts to decolonize the academy and libraries for the benefit of all students (see Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Canadian Federation of Library Associations / Federation Canadienne des Associations de Bibliotheques, n.d.). Given Canada's history of colonialism and the significant role educational institutions have played in that history, librarians need to carefully consider when to guide a student (whether Indigenous, non-Indigenous, or international) into the institutional *habitus*, and when to challenge that *habitus* instead. There remains a need to regularly revisit all aspects of the program described above in this regard. One example might be to include in future PLP messages a request to hear from the students about their stories of previous educational experiences or the communities from which they come.

In an article on literacy mediators working with immigrant communities, Mihut (2014, p. 59) observed that alternating perspectives between emic and etic (participant and observer) viewpoints, literacy mediators can develop a critical stance on the institution being mediated. This kind of alternating perspective is important regardless of the student's background or the community with which they identify. In positioning themselves in a mediating role, librarians should take the opportunity to look at things through the eyes of those who come to them as outsiders to the *habitus* of their institutions, and seek places where students and other library users can be best served not by assimilating them into the mediator's ways of doing things, but by changing the mediator's ways of doing things. Perhaps this is an equally important way of using the institutional-literacy lens to examine all of what libraries do.

Conclusion

Students and others come to our libraries with a range of literacies. However, many are not literate in the institution of the library or its host institution. In post-secondary students this produces a range of responses, including library anxiety. One way of addressing a lack of institutional literacy regarding the university and academic libraries (and accompanying library anxiety) is through a personal librarian program. Such a program positions the librarian as a literacy mediator who can guide students who are finding their way in higher education. Institutional literacy may also provide a useful lens through which to examine other library programs and the relationships libraries have with their users and surrounding communities.

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Appendix 1: Sample PLP Messages

Following is the original text used in two emails from the first set of personal librarian messages at the University of Regina during the fall 2018 and winter 2019 semesters, as personalized by the Student Success Librarian. All photos, graphics, footers, and other visual formatting have been removed. Buttons linking to an online resource are indicated with [Link] and the wording on the button.

Message one

Greetings!

As your personal librarian, I would like to welcome you to the University of Regina.

My name is Brad Doerksen, I am the student success librarian at the Archer Library.

I am here to help you succeed as a student this year. University comes with a range of challenges and opportunities, including library research. The library is a welcoming space with people who are here to help you navigate through your studies.

Over the next few months I will occasionally provide you with some information about the library. So keep an eye out for more emails from me about all the wonderful things that the library can provide! I invite you to drop by the library, or contact me at brad.doerksen@uregina.ca or 306-337-2927.

All the best,

Brad Doerksen

Student Success Librarian

I was born and raised in treaty one territory, and from my youth learned to appreciate the natural beauty of the prairies. Back country canoe trips have been an important part of my family experience. I also love to explore the back-roads of Saskatchewan on my bicycle, observing wildlife and feeling the wind in my hair and the sun on my face.

As a librarian my job is to help undergraduate students make the best possible use of library services and resources.

Library Help Desk

When you come to the library, a great place to start is at the help desk, just to the right of the library entrance. The friendly help desk staff can answer your questions and point you in the right direction. Your first visit would be a great time to activate your library account on your student card, giving you access to all the library's physical and electronic resources.

Library Hours

The Library is open from

7:30 a.m. - 10:45 p.m. on weekdays,

8:00 a.m. - 10:45 p.m. on weekends.

[Link] Full List of Library Hours

Message three

Hello,

It is almost time for final exams. That means you have nearly made it through your first semester! Take a moment and congratulate yourself on making it this far. Final exams can be a stressful time so drop by the Archer Alcove in the library for a coffee and a game of Jenga, or whatever activity you find stress relieving. It is important to find ways to manage the stress that comes with the pressures of exams and end of term deadlines, including finding time to relax (maybe watching a movie) and planning your study times (maybe taking advantage of the library's extended hours). And when exams are done, I hope you have a refreshing holiday season.

All the best,

Brad Doerksen

Student Success Librarian

I started working at the University of Regina in 2015 and I still regularly learn about services and resources available on campus. So don't think that because you have been a student here for a few months you should already know everything about the university. Feel free to contact me with any questions you might have, even if they are not library specific, and I will do my best to help you find the supports you need to succeed.

Stress Happens

Stress is a natural part of student life. It is important to start managing your stress in a good way before it becomes too much to handle. Below are a few links to resources that can help. The Aboriginal Student Centre also provides you with many personal supports, including a resident Grandmother. Kokum Brenda is happy to meet with students Monday through Thursday. To book an appointment, please visit the ASC (RI 108).

[Link] What is Stress?

[Link] U of R Counselling Services

Relax With Movies and Music

Maybe it is time to have a bit of fun watching a movie or listening to some music. The library has you covered. You can find a number of streaming music and video resources listed with the library databases. Don't have a subscription to Netflix or Spotify? No problem! Your access to a number of streaming services has been paid for by the library! For your convenience I have linked two of these streaming options here for you.

[Link] Go to Criterion on Demand

[Link Go to Naxos Music Library

Extended Library Hours

We understand the pressure of studying for final exams, which is why the library stays open until 2:00 a.m. during final exams. And if you are staying on campus late we want you to be safe. The Walk A Long program is a 24 hour free service that offers a safe walk to your car, bus stop, or anywhere on campus. Call 306-585-4999 or press the Walk A Long button on campus pay phones (no coins required).

[Link] See Our Full Hours Listing

[Link] Go to Campus Security Page