Instruction Assessment Task Force Report

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The Instruction Assessment Task Force was formed in May 2011, and charged to develop a standardized set of questions and standard scale to be used for all Instructional Sessions (IS), including primarily course-related instruction (CRI) sessions, workshops, and seminars. The Task Force was also charged with recommending a model for centralized IS assessment procedures, including collection (electronic and in print), analysis, retention, and reporting. The Task Force was also asked to recommend a model for data use for teaching improvement and annual professional development, and to consider privacy of data issues. The following is the Task Force's Report on these respective issues.

Background: Task Force (TF) work began May 2011, working around frequent absences during the Summer due to conference attendance and vacations. A literature search was undertaken by the TF to discover relevant publications related to policies, procedures of library teaching and student learning assessment, sample questions, and related issues of what the data are used for, and by whom. An EndNote Web citations file was created and shared with TF members, and members contributed citations and provided descriptive abstracts for articles they contributed to the bibliography. TF members were encouraged to share copies of articles in one central location for all to read. Information from these articles informed many aspects of the TF's work.

1. Recommend a Model for Centralized IS Assessment: In July 2011, the TF encountered a significant roadblock in its work. The TF discovered that Class Climate, the assessment technology we had planned to use to make centralized IS assessment procedures, collection, and analysis possible would not work for the purpose of assessing CRI sessions, which (outside of Lib 160) comprise the bulk of Instructional Sessions that librarians teach. The problem is that systems such as Class Climate require the names and emails of students as the mechanism through which a student receives the assessment survey. Class Climate is used for Lib 160 student course evaluations and student evaluations of teaching, and is ideal for formal course assessment in which the librarian is the recognized instructor of record. However, this level and ease of centralized assessment is unlikely for other types of library Instruction Sessions. It is unlikely that librarians will ever know (or be able to gather) the names and emails of their CRI attendees, and significant levels of library staffing would be required to undertake survey management and significant data input for hundreds of CRI sessions each year. This makes the Class Climate method of assessment (survey distribution, data analysis, retention, and reporting) impractical if not impossible for CRI and similar IS. The TF considered and discussed other software options including SharePoint and Survey Monkey, which also have similar disadvantages. According to information shared by Greg Davis at the August R&I Division meeting, Sharepoint as a survey tool is not as robust as Survey Monkey, and like Class Climate also uses email distribution which would require getting student names/emails in order to disseminate the survey. Although Survey Monkey includes means of assuring surveys reach relevant users only, these methods have similar limitations making them impractical and unrealistic for IS evaluation. One method is to limit respondees to certain IP addresses, which is impractical since most course-related instruction takes place in classrooms or learning spaces without student computers. It would also effectively lock out responses from students' personal computers or hand-held devices. The other method is to use direct email distribution via inputting student emails into the system, the same limitation discussed earlier with Class Climate and Sharepoint. Survey Monkey also has non-private means of survey distribution, such as linking a survey on a web page or LibGuide. However, this public availability of the survey introduces potential outsiders who did not attend an Instructional Session to "evaluate" it nonetheless.

In the past three years, R&I Division librarians completed an annual average of 109 CRI sessions alone, reaching an average of 3000 students each year. An ambitious centralized assessment of Instruction Sessions would also require significant increased library staffing to support this new activity, even if "low tech" paper and pencil surveys were used and raw data submitted to staff for manual data entry into a centralized system or database. If each R&I librarian were to assess all their CRI sessions by paper surveys or individual web forms and then submit their data to be input into a centralized system or database, this would represent a very large data management operation requiring dedicated staffing the Library currently lacks. Even bubble sheet assessments were considered, but the University is moving quickly away from supporting bubble sheet analysis.

Recommendations: The TF has reluctantly concluded that while centralized CRI assessment is a good goal, there currently is no software available that can handle centralized dissemination, collection, and data analysis in a robust, secure, and scalable manner, and "low tech" centralization via paper survey compilation and data entry represents a very significant workload. The TF chair discussed these findings with RIMT in July 2011. RIMT agreed with the TF's findings that this portion of the TF charge is unable to be completed at this time due to lack of technology support to achieve centralized assessment for these types of Instructional Sessions. The TF recommends plans for a robust centralized assessment of CRI and similar IS be put on hold until technology and staffing limitations might be addressed, and that the Reference & Instruction Management Team review the issue next year.

The TF also recommends that the Head of Instruction and the AD for R&I might explore whether a simpler, hybrid model could be devised to collect, store, analyze, and report IS evaluation data, using a combination of hard copy evaluation forms and a specially designed Access database. While low tech, paper surveys distributed in session ensure maximum and immediate return, thus maximizing the potential "teaching improvement" benefits to the librarian. If the Head of Instruction and the AD for R&I determine that existing R&I staff can handle database construction, maintenance, data entry, and basic routine reporting, a pilot project should be developed to test this simple centralized system, until such time as a more robust solution is possible. Another important aspect of the pilot project would be to assess whether existing staffing can support the ongoing data entry, as the manual data entry still represents a significant workload.

2. Develop a standardized set of questions to use for all IS assessment.

Several hundred course-related instruction evaluation questions used by local colleagues were collected, compiled, and coded by the TF chair, along with ISU CELT's Student Evaluation of Teaching "Sample Questions" (see: http://www.celt.iastate.edu/set/samplequestions.html), which are best practice suggestions for student evaluation questions, and two general Summative questions (included on CELT's "Sample Questions") that are mandated for use by ISU's College of LAS. A Google Docs file was created by the chair and shared with TF members. The Task Force made excellent progress in reviewing these questions and a few additional questions used by national colleagues. After review and discussion, the TF agreed that the bulk of these questions were merely variations on a few key questions evaluating student learning, teaching performance, and gathering demographics.

TF members reviewed all questions and indicated those they felt were most important to ask on a standardized evaluation form. These included demographic questions, questions focused on student learning outcomes, and the two General Summative questions included in CELT's "Sample Questions" and mandated for use in LAS, those being questions related to the overall effectiveness of the instructor and the session. Many of these questions were already being used by TF members and other librarian colleagues. This resulted in a total of 14-16 questions that all TF members agreed were important. These were intended to comprise the recommended standardized set of questions to use for all IS assessment.

However, when the TF learned a centralized approach would not be feasible in the immediate future, TF members agreed a much shorter and more streamlined approach was necessary since paper and pencil evaluations are most likely to be the norm, due to technology limitations and due to the fact that many librarians currently do not regularly assess their CRI sessions. In other words, the TF wished to make it easy (rather than difficult) for colleagues to comply and begin assessing their CRI sessions with greater frequency and using a standardized form. It would be easier yet effective for all librarians to budget time for attendees to complete a 5-item survey, rather than a 16-item survey.

Accordingly, the TF collaborated to produce a session-ready 5-item evaluation form with a standard scale (see below for description). The 5 questions include one demographic question, two questions focused on learning outcomes, and the two General Summative questions included in CELT's "Sample Questions" and mandated for use in LAS. At the August 2011 R&I Division meeting, Vega Garcia shared brief information about the TF's development of 5 recommended questions for IS assessment, the Fall 2011 pilot, and availability of the easy-to-use form on the R&I shared directory. She also invited anyone interested to help pilot the form this Fall 2011, and asked that anyone using the form to please inform the TF so that the TF can follow up with them regarding their experiences.

Recommendations: Given the technology limitations that were discovered, the TF recommends all librarians assessing their CRI sessions use **5 recommended questions** (see attached), with an optional demographic question asking student rank. For the time being, the TF agreed that a paper and pencil form will be easiest for most librarians, particularly since many CRI sessions do not take place in computer labs or computer classrooms. Further, three members of the TF (Dinkelman, Matava, Vega Garcia) committed to pilot this Fall 2011 the use of the 5 recommended questions in their own CRI sessions. The TF also agreed that a copy of the instrument should be made available on the shared R&I directory, which was done in August 2011. Other librarians doing CRI should be encouraged to also pilot the instrument as well, with the plan that at the end of the Fall 2011 semester, the TF will reconvene informally to review how things went.

3. Develop a standardized scale to use for all IS assessment.

The TF recommends that, for reasons of comparison, it is useful to use the same 4-point Likert scale that is used for Library 160 student evaluations. A 4-point Likert is a widely-used "forced choice" methodology that eliminates a middle "Neutral" category, thereby encouraging respondents to express an opinion. The 4-point scale is as follows:

Strongly agree; Agree; Disagree; Strongly Disagree

Recommendations: The TF recommends this standardized scale be used, and has made use of it on the session-ready 5-item survey developed by the TF being piloted this Fall 2011.

4. Recommend a model for data use for teaching improvement and annual professional development.

Discussion focused on the purposes for CRI assessment. One question touched upon is how professional development can be achieved, both individually and programmatically, if Instruction Session evaluation data are not centralized but are kept private and personal as they have been for decades. In the absence of an obtainable centralized assessment system, and in light of the fact that many librarians have not been assessing CRI with great regularity, it is difficult to address a model for data use in the absence of data. It may be that this charge can be well addressed only after a majority (if not all R&I librarians) always assess their CRI & IS sessions, and are willing to discuss/share the results with others.

- Larger questions emerged in TF discussions, such as whether CRI sessions truly warrant this level of intense ("centralized") scrutiny, in that they represent a highly variable15-50 minute guest lecture in someone else's class. Opinions among the TF members differ on this issue. The TF includes members who are passionate about CRI sessions and members who do not ever do this type of teaching. All agree that CRI assessment is important, but as yet there is no agreement on how often it should be done. A common-sense suggestion of "reasonable frequency" was suggested, but this is a highly subjective measure that colleagues would certainly interpret in different ways.
- TF members also agree that most CRI sessions do not allow the librarian a significant degree of control to decide learning outcomes, learning strategies, or session content. Often these are largely determined by the classroom instructor, and may not align well with the librarian's own judgment regarding quantity of material, time or activities necessary to enhance learning, or the most appropriate teaching approach. Few librarians have strong and truly collaborative partnerships with classroom faculty, which allows much greater co-teaching possibilities. Is it "right" to potentially base performance evaluations on such varied sessions?
- TF members agree that the standardized questions should fit all CRI sessions. At the same time, members agree there is great variance in the learning experience, content, and teaching / learning approach of each session. According to Instruction quantitative statistics, some CRI sessions are as brief as 15 minutes. What can or should be evaluated from a 15 minute session?
- TF members are divided on the issue of how CRI evaluation data should be used for professional development. Sharing / discussing one's CRI evaluation data with others was mentioned as desirable and helpful. However, there was not agreement on the question of with whom librarians should discuss their assessment data. While other libraries use regular conferences with the Instruction department head / coordinator, some TF members thought there would be local "push back" at such a model. At the same time, some TF members pointed out they sometimes felt they had to figure out

CRI assessment issues on their own with little guidance. While there has been programming and support, it's unclear how the Instruction department or other Library departments can provide more support or guidance if librarians do not discuss or share their evaluation data and assessment concerns.

Recommendations: Before a model can be developed for data use for teaching improvement and annual professional development, the data first need to exist. The first important step is to encourage all librarians to assess their CRI and other IS, and to use the standardized form and its scale. This in itself is an ambitious goal that will need ongoing administrative and supervisory support until a more robust culture of assessment is developed. There is some discomfort among TF members with the idea of "mandating" CRI assessment, and that such a decision or statement should not come from the TF but from administrators. If the simple hybrid model of data collection (discussed under Recommendations for Item 1, above) can be developed, the TF recommends the data there be visible by the Head of Instruction, the supervisory Subject Department Heads, and the AD for R&I. This is similar to the read/write permissions for the existing R&I Division-wide statistics. This model would introduce a more routine sharing of evaluation data, making it possible for potential training or support needs to become known should they not be discussed directly with R&I administration. In addition, if this pilot hybrid model can be developed, the TF recommends ongoing administrative and supervisory support will be necessary to encourage librarians to participate in the pilot through submission of their collected data, and to ensure that data entry and basic routine reporting work smoothly.

The TF has also discussed the purposes of CRI evaluation for teaching improvement and for performance evaluation. Some TF members question whether CRI evaluation data should be used in librarian performance evaluations. As one TF member pointed out, other professional practice areas of the PRS (such as reference work or collection development work) are not boiled down to numbers for the purpose of annual performance evaluations. Not all librarians who teach have an emphasis on CRI or other IS. Given this, is it meaningful to compare evaluation data from librarians who do a significant number of CRI sessions each semester with those who do one session every year? The research literature and anecdotal data demonstrate some skepticism on whether impressionistic evaluations from one-shot 50-minute library CRI and IS accurately measure student learning or the true value of the session, let alone the "effectiveness" of the librarian's teaching. The TF recommends the Instruction Department Head pursue discussions on this topic with the AD for R&I and RIMT.

5. Consideration of privacy of data issues.

See discussions and Recommendations under Items 1 and 4, above.

Report submitted to RIMT by Susan Vega Garcia, TF Chair, October 19, 2011, and amended Oct. 26, 2011, on behalf of the Instruction Assessment Task Force:

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