



Bridging The Gap: Developing Library Services And Instructional Programs For Transfer Students At Appalachian State University

By: Kelly Rhodes McBride, Margaret N. Gregor, and Kelly C. McCallister

Abstract

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Design/methodology/approach – This paper is a case study enhanced by a literature review, outlining the development of services, resources and instruction for transfer students at one institution.

Findings – This paper provides information about the need for library services designed specifically for transfer students at four-year institutions and the importance of cross campus collaborations to develop and offer these resources.

Originality/value – The literature on the provision of library services to transfer students is minimal. This case study details the development of cross campus collaborations that resulted in enhanced library services for this population.

Kelly Rhodes McBride, Margaret N. Gregor, Kelly C. McCallister (2017). "Bridging the gap: Developing library services and instructional programs for transfer students at Appalachian State University", *Reference Services Review*, Vol. 45 Issue: 3, pp.498-510, <https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-10-2016-0067>. Version of record available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-10-2016-0067>

Reference Services Review

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Article information:

To cite this document:

Kelly Rhodes McBride, Margaret N. Gregor, Kelly C. McCallister, (2017) "Bridging the gap: Developing library services and instructional programs for transfer students at Appalachian State University", Reference Services Review, Vol. 45 Issue: 3, pp.498-510, <https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-10-2016-0067>

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<https://doi.org/10.1108/RSR-10-2016-0067>

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Bridging the gap

Developing library services and instructional programs for transfer students at Appalachian State University

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this paper is to profile the evolution of library services and information literacy instruction provided for transfer students in collaboration with other campus units at a Master’s level institution and for librarians wishing to develop services for this population.

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Keywords Academic libraries, Library instruction, Information literacy, Transfer students, Campus collaboration, Transfer student success

Paper type Case study

Transfer students and their need for institutional support

Presently, transfer students comprise a significant population in colleges and universities. Nationwide, 46 per cent of all students who received a degree at a four-year institution in 2013-2014 had enrolled in one or more courses at a two-year college during the previous 10 years ([National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2015](#)). This statistics indicates that many students who begin their college career at a two-year institution do so with the intent of transferring and earning a four-year degree. Of these students, 62 per cent graduate with a bachelor’s degree within six years ([Shapiro *et al.*, 2013](#)).

Reflecting national trends, Appalachian State University (ASU) has experienced growth in transfer student enrollment over the past decade, and this population is expected to increase. The majority enroll as second-year students, come to the University from community colleges and have a significant impact on University graduation rates ([Office of Transfer Services, 2015, 2016](#)). Administrators and faculty have recognized the importance of this population and have begun to collaborate across campus units, including the library, to provide services and resources to transfer students.

This case study, compiled retrospectively from official University documents, includes a literature review describing the importance of providing library resources for transfer students and chronicles the steps taken to identify, develop and expand services for these students at ASU. Library outreach began through collaborations with other units serving this population. These relationships have expanded over time, and, as a result, librarians



now participate in Transfer Student Orientation, collaborate with the Office of Transfer Services (OTS) and student groups to provide services, establish ongoing partnerships with feeder school librarians and provide resources designed specifically for transfer students. In this paper, the authors define feeder schools as two-four-year college/universities where students begin their academic career prior to transferring.

Literature review

Library impact on student retention and success

Research indicates that the academic library may contribute to native and transfer student persistence and academic success by offering information literacy instruction and providing services, resources and places for study and interaction. Wong and Cmor (2011) and Bowles-Terry (2012), for example, note a relationship between information literacy instruction and a student's graduating grade point average (GPA). In his seminal work, *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access To Them, And Why They Matter*, George Kuh (2008) identifies ten educational practices for creating rich undergraduate experiences that promote student engagement and retention. Many institutions are implementing these practices, which include undergraduate research opportunities, writing-intensive courses and capstone research projects. While librarians have long recognized the importance of course-integrated information literacy instruction, recent research indicates that librarians are also incorporating this instruction in these high-impact practices, which require a sophisticated level of information seeking skills. Hensley's 2015 survey shows that many librarians are teaching advanced research skills in high-impact practice courses, whereas Murray's (2015) research indicates that academic library directors are aligning services, and especially information literacy instruction, with these initiatives.

Numerous studies find a positive relationship between student use of library resources and service points and their academic success. Notable ones include Haddow (2013), Haddow and Joseph (2010), Murray *et al.* (2016), Soria *et al.* (2013) and Thorpe *et al.* (2016). All of these researchers note that library use correlates with student retention and higher GPAs. Additionally, the provision of library space for studying and academic and social interactions has a direct impact on student persistence, as does the friendliness of reference personnel and student perception of the library as a welcoming place (Elteto *et al.*, 2008; Grallo *et al.*, 2012; Stemmer and Mahan, 2016; Zhong and Alexander, 2007).

The Association of College and Research Libraries Assessment in Action: Academic Libraries and Student Success program corroborates many of these findings. Their initiatives provide evidence that academic libraries contribute to student learning and success when students make use of the library and its resources, receive information literacy instruction and when partnerships are formed between the library and other campus units such as the writing center and other academic enrichment units (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2016).

Library service provision for transfer student

The literature on the provision of information literacy instruction and library services for transfer students is limited. In the late 1980s, Gail Staines, a librarian at Clinton Community College in Plattsburgh, NY, noted the increasing numbers of students transferring to State University of New York (SUNY) Plattsburgh. She found that the academic success of these students depended, in part, on the acquisition and use of information literacy skills and that they sometimes had trouble adjusting to a larger academic library and upper level research requirements. In addition, they often had to delay enrollment in the university's required research skills course, which had a negative impact on their academic success. Staines

created a research course that was included in an articulation agreement between the two colleges (Staines, 1990). During this same time period, a SUNY Librarian Association task force developed guidelines that articulated the library skills and competencies community college graduates needed to acquire before transferring (Staines, 1990).

Staines continued her research in a dissertation study that explores the perceptions of library professionals at community colleges and four-year institutions regarding their libraries' actual and potential roles in teaching information literacy skills to transfer students. She notes that library professionals agree that the goal of information literacy is "[...] teaching students how to use resources effectively" (Staines, 1996, p. 98). However, her research shows fundamental differences in information literacy instruction methodologies between institution type. Community college librarians often taught the use of resources outside the framework of the research process, whereas librarians at four-year institutions expected transfer students to possess the information literacy skills necessary to conduct upper level research. Staines concludes that librarians should design information literacy instruction for transfer students and that this instruction could be enhanced by increased communication between two- and four-year institution librarians (Staines, 1996). It is noteworthy that academic librarians largely ignored this call.

During this time period, a few other librarians were writing about the need to serve transfer students at individual institutions. In the Fall of 1988, librarians at the University of Arizona developed an orientation program for transfer students in cooperation with their Center for Transfer Students. Evaluation of their efforts indicates that it was important to offer the orientation early in the semester and to schedule evening and weekend sessions (Cox and Johnson, 1992). Still (1990) suggests that community colleges could help to enhance transfer student success by making information about the transfer process available in their libraries. She also recommends that community college library instruction include information about reference tools found in four-year institution libraries and stress the universality of information literacy skill application. Like Staines, she notes that communication between librarians at two and four-year schools regarding bibliographic instruction could ease the transfer process for students (Still, 1990).

In the early 2000s, librarians at Oakland University began to work with student affairs professionals to increase the library's visibility to transfer students, a population representing more than half of their student body. Librarians increased their interactions with these students by participating in orientations, creating handouts describing library services for transfers, offering workshops, providing a tiered program of information literacy instruction, expanding liaison programs and participating in campus-wide events. These efforts increased transfer students' library use and enhanced the image of the library as a contributor to student success across campus (Kraemer *et al.*, 2003). This work has continued to expand for more than a decade and serves as a prototype for librarians wishing to design outreach programs for this population (Hess *et al.*, 2015).

Another effort to address the retention of transfer students occurred at Western Washington University. Librarians conducted interviews with successful transfer students and administered a survey to discover the information seeking skills and needs of this population. Results indicated that 68 per cent of respondents desired additional library instruction. Librarians responded by designing a discipline-specific library instruction program for upper division and graduate students. They also established collaborative relationships with other departments on campus as part of an effort to increase retention and provided information about library services for transfer students in a variety of venues (Tag, 2004).

In 2010, Phillips and Atwood reported findings of a survey designed to determine whether library instruction was provided to transfer students at two- and four-year OhioLINK libraries. They received responses indicating that library instruction was believed to be integral to the library mission but that the vast majority of respondents did not offer separate information literacy instruction for transfer students. Their survey also provided evidence that the responding librarians did not understand the implications of the increasing numbers of transfer students at their institutions, the unique characteristics of transfers, the need for separate information literacy instruction for this population and the impact of library use and instruction on student success and retention (Phillips and Atwood, 2010).

The need to influence student success upon transfer has been addressed by the states of Colorado, Rhode Island, WI, OR and New Jersey with the development of rubrics for library instruction across community college and four-year institutions. These rubrics articulate the information literacy skills needed by students in each year of their college experience and provide a blueprint for information literacy instruction that, if followed, help to ensure that transfer students are prepared for upper level research. The creation of these rubrics also encourages communication between librarians at two and four-year institutions (Kisker, 2007; DaCosta and Dubicki, 2012).

The literature indicates that librarians at some four-year institutions do not understand the information literacy competencies that incoming transfer students possess or their need for specialized library services. Staines' research during the 1990s calls for information literacy instruction designed for transfer students, yet there is a lack of literature detailing ways that librarians can establish these programs. The increase in the number of transfer students and their efforts to attain a four-year degree indicates that it is critical for librarians to work to comprehend the characteristics of this population and to develop programs that facilitate transfer student success.

Transfer students at Appalachian State University

ASU, located in Boone, NC, is a public, four-year large, primarily residential University with an enrollment of approximately 18,026 students (Carnegie Classification of Institution of Higher Education, Center for Postsecondary Research, IN University School of Education, 2015). ASU offers undergraduate, selected masters and intermediate programs, and a Doctorate in Education, and is one of 17 campuses comprising the University of North Carolina (UNC) system (Appalachian State University, 2016, p. 2).

ASU's experience with increased enrollment of transfer students is in alignment with the published literature and ongoing national conversations about the impact of transfer student enrollment at institutions of higher learning. The enrollment projection for 2002-2020 shows a planned increase to 19,773 students from 14,178 (Institutional Research, Assessment and Planning, 2014-2015a). In order for the University to meet this projection, enrollment increase across student types is necessary. However, transfer student enrollment will be particularly impactful in helping achieve this goal (Institutional Research, Assessment and Planning, 2014-2015b).

As the student population increases and ASU strives to attain its educational benchmarks, the institution must work to facilitate the success of transfer students. One of the most consistent predictors of success is the perception of social and academic fit on the part of transfer students (D'Amico *et al.*, 2014; Johnson, 1987; Wang and Wharton, 2010). Tinto and Pusser (2006) outline several institutional initiatives that can facilitate integration into four-year schools. These include establishing a commitment to student success across the institution, helping students gain an understanding of institutional expectations,

supplying academic, social and financial support, providing frequent feedback on academic performance and furnishing opportunities for academic and social involvement on campus. In addition, the coordination of these efforts across campus units has been found to have a positive impact on student success.

Building partnerships and cultivating cross-campus relationships

The libraries have partnered with other units on campus that share the commitment to serving the needs of transfer students. University Libraries comprises Belk Library and Information Commons and Erneston Music Library. Librarians at our institution hold faculty status, which affords the opportunity to participate in all areas of faculty governance, including membership on university level task forces. In recent years, librarians have been involved in three important initiatives – the General Education Task Force (GETF), Office of Transfer Articulation (OTA) and the Transfer Services Team (TST) – all of which laid the groundwork for ASU to respond to the academic needs and retention of transfer students.

In January 2005, ASU convened the GETF to develop a “signature General Education program for Appalachian State University” ([General Education Task Force, 2007](#), p. 7). The Associate University Librarian, a member of GETF, assisted in the inclusion of information literacy and other competencies that would demonstrate the “acquisition of knowledge in a particular subject area or activity, an understanding of the process of acquiring that knowledge, and an understanding of the application of that knowledge” ([General Education Task Force, 2007](#), p. 9). In 2010, the OTA was created to provide prospective and current transfer students with accurate information on transfer of credits. The creation of the OTA provided expertise on transfers for the campus. Their work, and the development of relationships with this office, helped librarians begin to develop an understanding of the unique needs of this population ([Transfer Services Team, 2013](#), p. 8).

In February 2013, the UNC Strategic Plan required institutions to create a “Transfer and Adult Student Success Center” and work to provide “Transfer students, both from the Community College System and within the UNC system, [. . .] seamless and timely paths to graduation” ([University of North Carolina, 2013](#), pp. 30-37). In response to this mandate, ASU formed the TST whose membership included representation from campus units involved in transfer-focused work, including the library. TST members identified opportunities for ASU to identify and create services and resources that should be available to transfer students.

The GETF, OTA and TST initiatives resulted in an overall improvement in services for transfer students. Librarian participation on the GETF facilitated the integration of information literacy skills in the revised general education learning goals and broadened the teaching of information literacy competencies to include both librarians and teaching faculty. Participation on the TST allowed librarians to contribute to conversations about the increasing importance of the transfer student population in higher education. Working closely with the Director of the OTS, formerly the OTA, the authors identified opportunities to learn about the unique needs and issues faced by the transfer population. This has aided us in assessing how our current offering of instructional services and resources meet the needs of transfer students.

University libraries, information literacy instruction and transfer students

The University Libraries at ASU offer a tiered program of information literacy and instruction that uses:

[...] advanced pedagogical methods and practices to enable students to become active participants in the learning process by helping them think critically and creatively, communicate well, and employ effective strategies to collect and interpret information ([Information Literacy Instruction Working Group, 2009](#), p. 2).

Access to information literacy instruction is a foundational skill in assisting faculty, staff and students in developing the ability to access, evaluate and use information successfully. The library's instruction program provides tours, course integrated instruction, online workshops and library credit courses throughout the curriculum. In addition, the library offers foundational information literacy instruction in the University's first-year programs.

All first-year students, who have not completed the University's General Education requirements, are enrolled in a First-Year Seminar (FYS) course. Through this required course, the library is able to provide foundational information literacy instruction to the majority of incoming first-year student. ASU initially included transfer students in a FYS section. However, given their broad range of ages, skill sets and experiences, including the transfer population in a course developed for first-year students, did not work. ASU experimented with transfer-only sections of FYS, but the course content for the transfer-only sections was not changed. Feedback from these students indicated that the course did not meet their specific needs, and, as a result, the transfer specific FYS courses were discontinued.

A recent change in the UNC system policy now defines transfer students as "any first time student entering an institution who has attended another postsecondary institution after graduating from high school" ([University of North Carolina \(UNC\) Policy Manual, 2015 700.1.1.2\(R\)](#)). As a result of this policy change, the FYS requirement is waived for transfer students with 30 or more hours of credit. These students transferring to ASU do not receive the library's foundational information literacy instruction through the University's required FYS courses. The authors' review of the general education curriculum reveals that some transfer students receive information literacy at the next tiered level through enrollment in a required sophomore level RC 1000 Writing Across the Curriculum WAC course ([General Education Program, 2009](#)). However, all transfer students are required to enroll in a junior-level writing in the disciplines course and may be required to take a Senior Seminar Capstone course in their major. Although the library instruction program typically provides information literacy instruction in these courses, transfer students may not have experienced consistent information literacy instruction through the library's tiered instruction program in the same systematic way that native students have.

The authors are aware of this gap in our information literacy instruction to the transfer population. We continue to work on initiatives that will allow us to identify the information literacy competencies necessary for transfer students and are working to design a tiered approach to instruction for them. Increasing librarian knowledge of transfer students is essential to any success we hope to have. Our progress toward this effort thus far has included attendance at national conference to learn about the needs of transfer students, participation in a nationwide study about transfer student information literacy competencies and the creation of a transfer students and the library workshop. The initiatives we have developed as a result of these experiences have helped us to further strengthen our relationships with departments and other library colleagues at two and four-year institutions.

Initiatives to develop library services for transfer students

Transfer students and the library workshop

In 2013, ASU's OTS, in collaboration with Academic Affairs, hosted the first institutional Transfer Symposium. Each campus unit was asked to participate, and the Belk Library sent

a team of four librarians. The objectives of the Symposium were to engage the campus in a conversation about creating an institution-wide vision for transfer students, to identify transfer students demographics, to understand the importance of transfer students to Appalachian and to learn how faculty and staff can serve transfer students ([Office of Transfer Services, 2016](#)). Those who attended were eligible for funding opportunities for projects to enhance learning services and programs, conduct research or to obtain matching funds to attend national conferences related to transfer students.

A group of ASU librarians was awarded a grant to create a one-day workshop for librarians from ASU's two- and four-year (public and private) feeder schools. ASU librarians realized that one way to meet the needs of transfer students was to work with librarians from these institutions. There was a recognized lack of awareness of the information literacy skills taught at feeder schools, the ways in which feeder school librarians assessed student learning and the level of information literacy competencies transfer students possessed upon enrollment at ASU. As a result, the following goals were established for the workshop: to understand the information literacy programs at feeder schools, to develop relationships with librarians at the schools where transfer students began their academic journey and to share best practices, tools and strategies for teaching and assessing information literacy ([McCallister et al., 2015](#)). Additionally, a means of on-going discussion beyond the workshop was developed. ASU librarians and the Director of the Learning Resource Center at Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute formed a committee to plan and host the *Transfer Students and the Library* workshop.

The workshop was held at the Belk Library and Information Commons on April 8, 2014. In all, 20 librarians from ASU and its feeder schools attended. The *Transfer Students and the Library* workshop provided an opportunity for librarians to discuss their information literacy practices and challenges and created an environment in which open discussions occurred. It also facilitated a way to share resources and concerns, to learn more about our respective programs and to open the door for future collaboration about the information literacy competencies of transfer students. In the discussions, it was confirmed that there is great variation in the information literacy instruction that transfer students receive and a recognition that this may lead to a gap in their information literacy skills. Consequently, this may lead to a lack of research preparation in upper level coursework.

ASU librarians presented their findings from the *Transfer Students and the Library Workshop* during a poster session at the 2014 Transfer Symposium. The poster ([Appendix 1](#)) highlighted the importance of collaboration between feeder schools' personnel and ASU. ASU librarians discussed how individuals in other departments could replicate our relationships with feeder schools to support transfer students. As a result, several departments from ASU created similar workshops with their feeder school colleagues.

National institute for the study of transfer students conference

Conversations with our colleagues in OTS and other librarians revealed that student services personnel do not understand the contributions that librarians make to transfer student success. We recognized the need to share our experience and knowledge at a conference that attracts professionals who serve transfer students and those who create transfer policy and conduct transfer-related research.

The authors attended the 2015 ([National Institute for the Study of Transfer Students, 2016](#)) conference to learn more about the needs of transfer students. Many sessions discussed transfer student demographics, factors that lead to their success and transfer shock. However, there were no discussions of the role of the library and the contributions librarians make to transfer students' success. The authors recognized an opportunity to

educate transfer student professionals on the role that the library can play in assisting these students and presented a poster, *Transfer Students and Libraries—The Missing Piece* (Appendix 2), at the 2016 conference. Many attendees had never thought about the impact that libraries can have on retention and success and asked us to share our resources and suggestions for collaboration across campus. The conference also provided the authors the opportunity to strengthen relationships with OTS and ASU's Orientation Department and learn more about national initiatives to serve transfer students and other diverse populations.

Understanding the previous educational experiences and information literacy preparation of transfer students, as well as their needs upon enrollment at a four-year institution, can assist the library in developing services that meet their unique needs. Librarians must decide how to provide services and resources effectively to the transfer student population. ASU's proactive collaborations to understand this challenge led to a partnership with Catawba Valley Community College (rural institutions) and DePaul University and Moraine Valley Community College (urban institutions) to work on a national study with EBSCO Information Services.

EBSCO transfer student research project

The EBSCO Information Services User Research Report *Community College & Transfer Student Interviews: Approach to Research and Information Literacy Skills* investigated the research and information-seeking skills of transfer students. The research goals of the study were to assess the information literacy skills gaps of transfer students planning to attend a four-year college/university, evaluate available resources/services for these students and identify ideas to use these resources as a way to close the information literacy skills gap (Gambrell, 2016). A notable finding from the study was that students revealed their reliance on the library as a space to study. This was a direct reflection of the literature which noted student's expectations of the library staff to provide a safe, friendly, communal space for studying and interaction, as well as additional resources such as tutoring and a writing center (Elteto *et al.*, 2008; Goodall and Pattern 2011; Grallo *et al.*, 2012). Remarkably, an interesting trend in regards to the faculty's role in research was revealed. Participants admitted they felt that their departmental faculty was the only source for research help. As a result, they specifically fostered these relationships. Their assumption was that the faculty knew the subject matter and had knowledge of the resources needed to succeed in their classes. Further observations indicated that the departmental faculty did not inform the participants of the availability of library resources and services available.

The data evaluated from this study indicates the importance of outreach to both transfer students and the faculty. Our goals for improving our efforts is to expand outreach to departmental faculty, provide more accessible and intuitive library resources and services and implement an efficient means for reaching out to transfer students from the beginning of their transfer experience.

Conclusion and impact

In the early and mid-2000s, ASU recognized the significance of its transfer student population and created stronger relationships with feeder schools, focused on transfer articulation, created the OTS and designed resources specifically for these students. The authors believe that librarians' longstanding participation in faculty governance and university committees provided a basis for inclusion in these important initiatives. This case study outlined the steps that librarians at ASU have taken to meet the needs of this important population. Our collaborations with other units on campus and feeder schools, our

review of the literature, and our participation in conferences have encouraged us to market the library to transfers through personal interaction, specialized websites and reference tools, webinars, orientations and tours and participation in activities designed for this population. We have established these initiatives because we want our transfer students to understand that library use can have an impact on their academic success, and we are seeing evidence that they are more aware of the resources and services that we provide.

The authors know that transfer students at ASU do not receive library instruction in the same systematic way that native students do. Cox and Johnson (1992) outline the difficulty in assessing what, if any, previous instruction transfer students may have received. Phillips and Atwood (2010) share their experiences in designing an online survey to gather information on two- and four-year public and private institutions and their use of unique classes, instructional materials and events targeted toward transfer students. We will continue working with librarians at our feeder schools so that we can benefit from their knowledge of students who plan to transfer. Additionally, we will work with our colleagues in OTS to find ways to identify the baseline information literacy competencies of our transfer population and begin the process of designing an instructional program for them. Our goal is to develop a required transfer course similar to the FYs but with an emphasis on skills needed in our junior and senior level curricula. We also plan to design and administer an ethnographic study to identify the unique characteristics of the transfer population at ASU. In the interim, librarians will continue to collaborate with faculty members teaching high-impact courses such as upper level writing-intensive classes, undergraduate research projects and capstone courses to offer library instruction and to identify students who may need additional reference assistance.

We know from our review of the library literature that there is a correlation between library use and student retention and success. The authors' experiences have revealed that there are untapped opportunities for librarians to share this information with teaching faculty and personnel in academic affairs, OTS and student services. Our relationships and collaborative efforts across campus will help us develop these conversations while also enhancing the work of the library to serve our transfer students.

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Appendix 1

Project proposal
Invite librarians from each of Appalachian's top feeder schools for a day-long conference to share information about teaching information literacy skills to first- and second-year students.

Information Literacy
the ability to find, locate, evaluate, and use information for the problem or issue at hand. Librarians in higher education study and implement models for developing information literacy among students.

Goals

- Understand the information literacy programs at our feeder schools.
- Develop relationships with librarians where our transfer students start.
- Share tools and strategies for teaching information literacy.
- Develop a shared plan for developing transfer students' information literacy skills as they move among institutions.

Agenda

- Breakfast | Welcome | Meet
- Small Group Discussions | Report Out
- Lunch
- Panel
- Marketing Presentation
- Why we teach - group discussion

What we learned

- Community college faculty and librarians are very similar to us: smart, hard-working, innovative, caring.
- We gained a sense of respect (and sympathy!) for their challenges.
- We found ideas and strategies they were doing we wanted to use – and things we were doing that we could share.
- Librarians wanted to meet and collaborate more regularly. They also wanted to collaborate online (Google Groups) to steal tools, discuss assessment, and share questions.

Attendees

Cabell/CC & TI	UNC Greensboro (4 year)	Catawba Valley CC	UNC Charlotte (4 year)	Wilkes CC
Forsyth Technical CC	Western Piedmont CC	Lenoir Rhyne (4 year)	Central Piedmont CC	Cleveland CC

Planning committee
George Donnan | Margaret Gregor | Kelly McBride | Kelly McCallister | Betsy Williams | Deb Joyner from Cabell/CC & TI

Next steps & replicability

- Faculty and staff at community colleges are eager to collaborate with us
- Keep conversation going! Google Groups | Listservs | letters to self
- Share resources, ideas, problems, learning and assessment tools
- Consider annual meetings at other nearby schools

create

Thanks to the librarians, staff, and students from each of the feeder schools who made this project possible. We are grateful for the support and assistance of the faculty and staff at each of the feeder schools who made this project possible. We are grateful for the support and assistance of the faculty and staff at each of the feeder schools who made this project possible.

