Introduction

What is embedded librarianship?

Embedded librarianship takes a librarian out of the context of the traditional library and places him or her in an “on-site” setting or situation that enables close coordination and collaboration with researchers or teaching faculty.


Why use an embedded librarianship model?

Students can receive extended one-on-one help that is not available in the traditional one-shot model.

Librarians get to know students and their research needs better. The Library forms strategic partnerships with various academic departments.

How do you implement and build an embedded librarianship model?

- Schedule class visits at the beginning of the semester.
- Recommended 7-8 visits over the course of a semester.
- Work closely with your faculty member and provide guidance on your role in class. Often, faculty are unsure of how to use us.
- Some of your class visits should center around a structured lesson plan, while others can be more passive. Remember to ask students questions about their research!
- Be a broken record! Offer your help over and over again. Students almost never take you up on your first offer.
- LibGuides can be a great tool for posting research resources that have been discussed in class.
- Hold office hours. Shy students don’t like to make appointments, so scheduled office hours can feel less intimidating.
- Regular communication with your faculty member will help you both to collaborate, set and maintain expectations, and support students.

Strategic Partnerships

Identify the courses in which you can be most useful.

History 490 is a capstone course and the students have advanced research questions. Often they need resources that are held outside of Murphy Library and benefit from librarians’ knowledge of how information is organized, where it is held, and who can provide access to it.

English 110 is UW-L’s required writing course for all first-year students. At this level, students need help with developing research questions and using the library’s tools. Providing help in foundational courses helps students to be more successful library users as they begin to take upper-level courses.

Examples of Questions

History 490 Capstone (Face-to-Face)

Q: I heard about a letter writing campaign that took place between January 1939 and December 1940. The letters were written by male nurses in the Army to various government officials appealing their Army status. During this time, female nurses could serve in the Nurse Corps, but men with the same training and degrees could only serve as orderlies. Can you help me find the letters?

A: The librarian again acted as an intermediary on behalf of her student and contacted the United States Army Archives. Through the archives, she was put in touch with the Army Office of Medical Command’s senior historian who scanned and sent 78 pages of letters from the male nurses and the responses from government officials.

Q: Can you help me track down the primary sources cited in this footnote?

Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation Archives, Archives of Industrial Society (AIS), University of Pittsburgh. Records include payroll ledgers, 1861-1901; diary of founder and president Benjamin Franklin Jones, 1875-1901; and memorandum book on properties, 1871-94. The archives also include numerous company histories and publications describing the various departments of the mill.

A: These materials are held at the University of Pittsburgh Archives. The librarian contacted the archives with a preliminary inquiry about the footnote and then put her student in touch with the Labor Archivist who was able to track down some of the original payroll records from the Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation.

Lessons Learned

Be prepared for a large time commitment. This includes in-class time, meeting one-on-one with faculty, and setting appointments with students.

Set objectives early & communicate with faculty often

Plan strategically. Embed yourself into courses with a significant research component

The Student Perspective

“I cannot say enough about how helpful an embedded librarian has been in our capstone seminar. To be perfectly honest, nothing prepares you for this big of a research paper. The amount of knowledge we, the students, think we have when it comes to writing a research paper is just not enough and the extra help that Liz has provided me has been very influential. When originally heard we had librarians assigned to our seminar I didn’t think anything about it. I thought to myself, ’Well, I sorta wish they had more than one or two librarians who will actually use them.’ After this a road block in my research I quickly realized I was the one that needed her help. She provided me with the knowledge of truly understanding the databases we were looking at and also the ability to make historical archivists answer back my emails, which I greatly appreciated. Overall, her helpfulness and ability to work with me shifted any expectations I had with librarians in the past and I am grateful for her help in my research and writing processes.”

- Luke Sauerman, History 490 Student

The Faculty Perspective

“A library colleague suggested to me the idea of an embedded librarian, and I decided to try it in my HIS 490 History Research Seminar since it fit neatly with the so-called “flipped classroom” method of instruction that I already do. A flipped classroom means that the content is delivered outside of class where students can interact with it at home and traditional “homework” is done in class so that faculty can be present to assist students. The practice and application of the material is done in the classroom, when the students can get direct feedback from me as I circulate among them.

Similarly, embedded librarianship brings the library to the user by providing services in settings outside the library. The librarian and I collaborated in the early stages of the course, she attended some classes, and was a research resource for the students during the semester. We all spent class time doing collective research and peer reviews of their writing drafts, both of which are high-impact educational practices promoted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities. Again, the librarian and I brought work they might do alone and outside of class into the classroom where we assisted them as they did it. Her presence in class during the early stages of research resulted in several key moments of research assistance that I simply could not have provided.

She and I did struggle to find the right balance of collaboration, namely when and how often she should attend classes. I was surprised that the librarian’s work with my students in class didn’t result with them seeking more individual meetings with her out of class. In the future, I would need to be reminded that she can continue to attend classes beyond the research phase and into the writing and analysis stages.”

- Jennifer Trost, Associate Professor of History, University of Wisconsin - La Crosse

Tought the History 490 History Research Seminar and began the initial collaboration on this iteration of embedded librarianship.