

## **Peer Review of Teaching for Instruction Librarians: An Annotated Bibliography**

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### Abstract

The purpose of this annotated bibliography is to provide instruction librarians with background information on the use of peer review of teaching in higher education. In particular, the bibliography includes resources for creating and implementing peer review of teaching programs at academic libraries. While there is a wealth of material published on the value and practice of peer review of teaching for faculty in higher education, the literature pertaining specifically to instruction librarians is limited. This bibliography offers examples of both formative and summative review programs at various university libraries, mainly in the United States. Rather than focusing on broad philosophical questions related to what constitutes good teaching and whether it can be effectively evaluated, the sources on this bibliography focus on the practical aspects of creating and running a successful peer review program.

**Keywords:** peer review of teaching; teaching observation; academic libraries; instruction librarians; academic librarians

### Rationale for the Bibliography

Peer observation or peer review of teaching has been a standard practice for faculty in higher education for a significant period of time. However, the use of peer observation of library instruction is relatively new. The wealth of literature on peer review for faculty and small amount of literature on peer review for librarians illustrates this point. This bibliography is intended to highlight a few key sources in the general field of peer review of instruction in higher education, while focusing specifically on the use of peer review in library instruction, predominately in academic libraries in the United States.

Many librarians do not receive formal training in pedagogy prior to being asked to teach as part of their job duties. As a result, pedagogical training occurs for many on the job. Some academic libraries have specific programs in place to train new instructors, while others do not. Peer review or observation programs offer one way to help both early career and experienced instruction librarians learn new skills, gain new ideas, and improve their existing skills. This bibliography focuses mainly on voluntary programs created by librarians who were interested in improving the quality of their instruction.

Most of the examples discussed here are formative in nature. They are not part of a formalized promotion or yearly evaluation process; instead they are created for and by instruction librarians for the purpose of learning and growing. However, there are a few sources that discuss summative programs in which supervisors perform the observations, record their observations in a standardized form, and then use those results to make personnel or promotion decisions. The distinction between the two types is an important one for anyone seeking to start a peer review program. In addition, the sources also show

that the choice of what to call one's program is also important. For some, the words peer "review" or "evaluation" have negative connotations that suggest a hierarchal judgment rather than a sharing of ideas among peers. That is why some decide to use more neutral terminology like peer "coaching" or "observation." As the literature on the topic makes clear, in order to implement a successful program, those in charge must make sure to clarify the purpose of the program, who will be involved, and how the information gleaned from the observations will be used.

In addition to providing background on the use and value of peer review for instructional librarians and examples of programs in academic libraries, my hope is that this bibliography will help contribute to the broader field of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL). Teaching and learning occurs in a variety of contexts, including the library, that are not always recognized in the SoTL literature. As a case in point, Nancy Chism's book *Peer review of teaching: A sourcebook* provides an excellent introduction to the topic and offers a wealth of examples. However, her chapter on "Peer Review in Special Contexts" sadly contains no mention of instruction in a library setting. It includes laboratory instruction, studio instruction, clinical instruction, service-learning instruction, and many others, but no mention of library instruction. My hope is that instituting either formative or summative peer review of library instruction programs might help bring attention to and legitimize the work instruction librarians do to others in the field of higher education.

### **Target Audience**

The target audience for this annotated bibliography is any librarian with instruction duties. The sources discuss examples of peer review programs in academic

librarians, but the information would be valuable for librarians providing instruction in a variety of contexts from public to special libraries. The bibliography focuses mainly on academic libraries in the United States but does contain two sources dealing with international institutions.

### **Materials Selection**

The sources cited in this bibliography were located using the University of Central Florida Libraries' catalog, *Library Literature & Information Science Full Text*, and *ERIC*. Keywords such as *peer review of teaching*, *peer review of instruction*, *peer coaching*, *academic librarians*, and *higher education* were used.

## References

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[edited.pdf](#)

Isbell, D., & Kammerlocher, L. (1994). A formative, collegial approach to evaluating course-integrated instruction. *Research Strategies*, 12(1), 24-32.

Middleton, C. (2002). Evolution of peer evaluation of library instruction at Oregon State University libraries. *Portal: Libraries & the Academy*, 2(1), 69-78.  
doi:10.1353/pla.2002.0019

Snavey, L., & Dewald, N. (2011). Developing and implementing peer review of academic librarians' teaching: An overview and case report. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 37(4), 343-351. doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2011.04.009

### Annotated Bibliography

Alabi, J., & Weare, W. H., Jr. (2014). Peer review of teaching: Best practices for a non-programmatic approach. *Communications in Information Literacy*, 8(2), 180-191.  
doi:10.15760/comminfolit.2012.8.2.171

The authors claim that peer review of teaching programs can help instruction librarians who haven't been formally trained in educational theories and methods to improve their teaching on the job. Alabi and Weare identify six principles to foster best practices in peer review: establishing a confidential environment with trust and respect; selecting an appropriate review partner; communicating clearly with the peer reviewer; focusing on specific aspects of teaching when giving feedback; designating ample time for the process; and preparing oneself to accept criticism. In the article, the authors provide a thorough review of the literature on the use of peer review in library instruction, focusing particularly on the use of formative reviews in academic libraries. The literature review reveals a pattern that many peer review programs follow: a pre-observation meeting between the instructor and observer, the observation itself, and a post-observation debriefing between the participants. In addition, they examine various definitions of "peer review" and "peer" in to assist librarians seeking to start a peer review program at their institution.

Chism, N. V. N., & Chism, G. W. (2007). *Peer review of teaching: A sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Bolton, MA: Anker Pub. Co.

This work is one of the most complete sources on the philosophy and practice of peer review in higher education. While the book is not specifically addressed to

librarians and library instruction, it still contains useful information. Chism and Chism define and defend the value of peer review as an effective way to improve teaching. They distinguish between formative evaluations intended for personal use and individual improvement and summative evaluations intended for public use and personnel decisions. Chism and Chism discuss and review the literature on the characteristics of effective teachers. She also acknowledges barriers to the peer review process, from an instructor feeling anxious about being observed to observers relying on their own teaching method preferences and biases when evaluating others. This book includes samples and templates from colleges and universities for all stages the peer review process, including drafting a statement of objectives, observation forms, and sample evaluation letters. This second edition contains a helpful chapter that the first edition did not on “Peer Review in Special Contexts,” such as in laboratories, studios, online courses, and other settings. While librarian instruction is not included, the other sections do contain information that can be applied to a standard, one-shot session format.

Dimmit, L., Maxwell, C., & C. Nesvig. (2019). Librarians as critical friends: Developing a sustainable peer observation process. *College & Research Libraries News*, 80(4), 216-219. doi:10.5860/crln.80.4.216

This article is the most recent one listed on this bibliography and demonstrates that the practice of peer observation of library instruction continues to be an important part of academic librarianship. The authors discuss a program involving librarians at the University of Washington-Bothell and Cascadia College to improve their library instruction. Librarians used the “critical friends” model, developed by



Costa and Kallick (1993). In contrast to a mandatory, summative assessment of instruction performed by a supervisor, this model encourages a voluntary, formative observation model based on openness and trust between the instructor and the observer. The concept of critical friendship and the literature on the topic mainly come from the field of education, but the authors argue that the model is applicable to library science as well. Dimmit et al. acknowledge that a group of librarians in Sweden were the first to apply to concept to library instruction. The “critical friend” program consisted of three parts: a pre-observation meeting between the instructor and critical friend, the observation, and a post-observation meeting. The final part of the process involved the friends writing summary letters of their observations of their peers’ sessions. The authors explain that those who participated found the program beneficial, and they argue that early career librarians, in particular, were most interested in participating in the program. Even though this article frames the peer evaluation process in the language of “critical friends,” the overall structure and emphasis on trust and openness are similar to other accounts of peer review of teaching programs at various university libraries.

Drew, S., & Klopper, C. (2015). *Teaching for learning and learning for teaching: Peer review of teaching in higher education*. Rotterdam: Sense. Retrieved from <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007%2F978-94-6300-289-9>

Drew and Klopper’s book, like Chism and Chism’s, is not targeted specifically toward librarians, but it still contains valuable information that can be applied to evaluations of library instruction. The book consists of a series of essays written by a group of faculty members at Griffith University in South East Queensland, Australia,

who participated in the PRO (Peer Review and Observation) of Teaching program. The first chapter addresses the complex question of what constitutes good teaching and introduces Duncan D. Nulty's (2010) eight dimensions of good teaching. The authors use Nulty's framework to design their evaluation criteria and forms, which are included in the book. The observation forms asked reviewers to examine elements such as content knowledge, pedagogical skills, concern for student learning, appropriateness of teaching materials, and effective curriculum design. While a few of Nulty's dimensions may not apply to a standard one-shot library instruction session, most of them do. One helpful section in the book provided advice on how to give constructive feedback. The authors recommended using a three-part sandwich for comments: start with the positive aspects, then move on to some points to consider, and finally conclude with suggested ideas for future sessions. A common point raised in multiple chapters was the value of receiving feedback from one's peers. While feedback from students or from one's supervisor may also be valuable, the authors claim that peers are best able to understand the demands of instruction and provide constructive feedback.

Finley, P., Skarl, P., Cox, J., & D. VanderPol. (2005). Enhancing library instruction with peer planning. *Reference Services Review*, 33(1), 112-122.  
doi:10.1108/00907320510581423

Finley et al. discuss a peer planning project to improve library instruction at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Unlike other articles on this bibliography, this article does not focus on the observation of teaching as a means of improving instruction. Instead, it focuses on the value of peer coaching and team teaching. The

authors propose hosting voluntary brainstorming sessions for instructional librarians interested in updating their pedagogies. The article describes a five-step process, beginning with a kick-off workshop to introduce participants to peer coaching techniques and active learning strategies. The second step was to arrange brainstorming sessions with the interested instructors. For the third part, the librarian taught the class using the brainstorming ideas, with a backup team member available during the class to assist if needed. After the class session, the instructor completed a post-instruction assessment about the peer coaching process, and finally the team met for a wrap-up discussion.

Garcia, S. A. V., Stacy-Bates, K., Alger, J., & Marupova, R. (2017). Peer evaluation of teaching in an online information literacy course. *Portal-Libraries and the Academy*, 17(3), 471-483. doi:10.1353/pla.2017.0030

While many sources referenced in this bibliography focus on evaluation of face-to-face instruction, this article provides a helpful discussion of evaluating teaching in an online context. In particular, the authors discuss a peer evaluation of teaching program for an online information literacy course at Iowa State University. In their literature review section, Garcia et al. acknowledge that while the practice of peer review in the field of education began in the 1950s, it was only instituted in library instruction in the early 2000s. The authors also distinguish between peer coaching and peer evaluation and provide examples of literature promoting the benefits of peer coaching for library instructors. The article refers to the well-known Quality Matters Rubric used to evaluate the design of online courses as well as the Rubric for Online Instruction (ROI) developed at California State University, Chico, in

2009. The participants in this program referred to both rubrics when developing their own Online Classroom Evaluation Form. The form includes sections on instructor contact, customization and tool use, communication, online learner support, and online teaching activity. Like other programs that evaluate face-to-face teaching, this one also included pre- and post-observation meetings and a summative descriptive letter written by the observer. The authors conclude that with more academic libraries developing online information literacy courses, the need for an effective method to evaluate online teaching will become increasingly important.

Gleason, N.W., & Sanger, C.S. (2017). *Guidelines for peer observation of teaching: A sourcebook for international liberal arts learning*. Retrieved from Yale-NUS College, Centre for Teaching and Learning, <https://teaching.yale-nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/2018/04/Peer-Observation-Booklet-web-version-edited.pdf>

This document produced by the Centre for Teaching and Learning at Yale-NUS College provides specific guidelines, sample questions, and templates for creating and implementing formative and summative peer review of instruction programs. Like Chism and Chism's book, this resource does not focus specifically on library instruction, but it still provides specific and helpful information which can easily be adapted to a library environment. Along with Chism and Chism's book, this resource is one of the most practical in terms of offering specific examples to anyone seeking to start or revise a peer observation program. Created through a partnership between Yale University and the National University of Singapore (NUS), Yale-NUS College is a residential liberal arts college located in

Singapore. The manual contains a detailed chart explaining the differences between formative and summative evaluations. Like other sources on this bibliography, this one recommends a three-part observation, but Gleason and Sanger include a list of questions to ask during the pre-observation meeting, a list of what to do and what not to do when observing a class, and guidelines for giving constructive feedback during the post-observation meeting. Unlike other sources, this one also brings up the issue of implicit bias and how observers can attempt to minimize their implicit bias when giving feedback. The authors provide advice for how to give constructive feedback, and they include a sample observation summary letter to illustrate model effective comments.

Isbell, D., & Kammerlocher, L. (1994). A formative, collegial approach to evaluating course-integrated instruction. *Research Strategies*, 12(1), 24-32.

In this article, the authors discuss a program designed by librarians at Arizona State University (ASU), West, to evaluate their library instruction. This is one of the older articles on the use of peer review in library instruction, and it is useful to provide a thorough review of literature on this topic. The authors discuss the importance of developing a set of principles to help guide the process. As a group, the ASU librarians devised six principles to guide their program: a group process, an ongoing commitment to the process, a formative focus, evaluation measures, immediacy, and multiple evaluation sources. The process employed three specific assessment instruments: a standardized evaluation form for professors to complete, librarian-created student evaluation forms, and informal reciprocal observations by colleagues. The program differed from others discussed in this bibliography by using

multiple assessment instruments to obtain feedback from professors and students in addition to other librarians. The discussion section of the article recognized that these multiple assessment methods did create challenges to the program, particularly with the non-standardized librarian-created evaluation forms. However, the authors conclude that all librarians who participated found it to be beneficial and wanted to continue with the program.

Middleton, C. (2002). Evolution of peer evaluation of library instruction at Oregon State University libraries. *Portal: Libraries & the Academy*, 2(1), 69-78.

doi:10.1353/pla.2002.0019

Middleton's article discusses the process, outcomes, and benefits of a required peer evaluation of instruction program at Oregon State University in 1998. Middleton argues for the value of peer review for library instruction and presents a review of relevant literature. She distinguishes between peer coaching and peer evaluation and between formative and summative evaluation. Unlike many of the programs described in the sources on this bibliography, this program was mandatory and was used as part of the promotion and tenure process. At the same time, like many of the other examples, this one was also designed with the broader goal of improving library instruction. The author explains that most library instruction takes the form of fifty-minute, one-shot sessions. To help develop their review process for library instruction, librarians surveyed faculty in various OSU departments—Chemistry, English, Public Health, and Exercise and Sport Science—to learn about their current practices for peer evaluation. Instruction librarians and their two peer reviewers were required to attend a two-hour training session, which explained how

to use the “Checklist of Observations” form to evaluate the sessions. Middleton concludes by discussing the benefits of the program, which included instructors and observers feeling like the experience helped them learn new teaching techniques as well as the department head being able to use the information generated by the process in annual reviews. The author states that with the peer review required as part of the promotion process, the needed infrastructure for peer evaluation is now in place at OSU Libraries, but the author also argues for the value of voluntary, formative peer review.

Snaveley, L., & Dewald, N. (2011). Developing and implementing peer review of academic librarians’ teaching: An overview and case report. *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 37(4), 343-351. doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2011.04.009

Snaveley and Dewald provide an overview of peer review of teaching, background on how it applies to library instruction, and a case study of their peer review program at Penn State University Libraries. The authors reference Nancy Chism’s books as an excellent resource on the practice of peer review in higher education. They also connect peer review of teaching to the broader area of the scholarship of teaching and learning. In the article, the authors recognize that there are a variety of methods used to evaluate library instruction but that peer review is not one of the more common ones. The authors explain that at Penn State, student and faculty feedback are encouraged, but peer review is required. Teaching portfolios for instruction librarians are optional. Like many other peer review programs discussed in this annotated bibliography, this one also involves a pre-observation meeting, the observation session, and a post-observation meeting. The observer’s comments take

the form of a letter in which the observer addresses the quality of the presentation, the degree of library knowledge, the usefulness or application, the content, and overall comments. The authors discuss the benefits of peer review to both new and veteran instructors. They also discuss how the process helped librarians at different campuses learn more about the university and its libraries. They conclude by listing the benefits of the process, including promoting collegiality between instruction librarians as well as improving student engagement.