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Bibliographic Instruction: the need to Edutain

In response to the article in the Winter 2001 LOEX Newsletter, "Making Student-Friendly Instruction: Education or Edutainment?" a distinction was made between "our need to educate" and "our students' desire to be entertained." No one is denying the fact Mr. Bridges' argument that "knowing how to do research, learning techniques for note taking or writing a proper footnote or bibliography is a serious exercise." But I question the tone and need for strictly traditional methods in teaching these skills to the "modern student" expressed in the article.

The most memorable courses in my academic career were taught by educators who not only used the power of "real life" and the "power of context", but were able to produce a smile or even "edutain". My experience has taught me that the words 'library', 'library tour', 'library orientation' and 'library skills' do not incite a mood of revelry among "modern students." Humor and "edutaining" can help to break down the ingrained social barriers between teacher and student. Field experts Beaubien, George and Hogan have noted, "the library should be able to provide on demand, cogent, interesting, perhaps even entertaining lectures that highlight the library's resources and the processes to exploit it." Moreover, they suggest that "humorous or offbeat examples can highlight student interest and –in theory- retention." Using humor does not make educators appear less intelligent or less "academic"; rather spontaneous humor helps to create a positive communicative climate and class rapport.

Combining humor with serious intellectual presentation does not create the "absolute worst of both worlds." The introductory lecture on writing footnotes can be as serious and as formal as possible, but will your students be paying attention? I always find that starting a presentation with a "why is this skill important scenario" helps to immediately capture the attention of the "MTV" student. Including a pop-culture reference or current event, helps to contemporize information to the audience.

Students are interested in results, and getting to the point is an important skill in all forms of communication -especially for educators. But there are opportunities in teaching that can include humor and personal perspective. I am not advocating turning an academic exercise into some "trendy attempt to be relevant or with-it", but using humor or modern day examples can enlighten any presentation. Perhaps more importantly, it makes the students remember your presentation, which ultimately makes them better library users – and isn't that our goal? In describing MeSH (Medical Subject Headings) I often use the analogy of a spider web that gathers up related terms all at once. I further this analogy by discussing the superhero Spiderman who uses his web to corral villains in the same way that MeSH is used to gather as many relevant citations all at once. Keeping students engaged is another challenge bibliographic instructors all face. If I ask a question and no one responds, I sometimes call out "Bueller, Bueller" and many students smile and

recognize the reference from the movie Ferris Bueller's Day Off and understand that I am asking them to participate in a discussion. "Edutainment" does not mean becoming a stand-up comedian, but it does mean combining serious intellectual content with entertaining aspects. Listservs such as the Bibligraphic Instruction (BI-L) and the LOEX conference offer opportunities to share stories and examples that help improve the overall quality of instruction.

The best educators wear many hats; they are content experts, actors, orators, storytellers, and listeners. "Traditional academic subjects" that combine edutainment and education are often the courses that are in high demand and fill-up quickly, while the ones that are strictly educational and ignore the edutainment possibilities are not as popular. The word 'library' has a stigma attached to it by many students. It is perceived as intimidating and unfriendly. The orientations, tours, and bibliographic instruction courses need to have elements that will not only maintain student attention, but will also teach them the foundations of research. A combination of edutainment and education are possible.

Anne K. Beaubien, Sharon A. Hogan, and Mary W. George, *Learning the Library: Concepts and Methods for Effective Bibliographic Instruction* (New York: Bowker, 1982) p.158 and 190.

Bibliographic Instruction Listserv: http://www.ala.org/acrl/is/bil.html

LOEX Conference: http://www.emich.edu/public/loex/conferen/2002/index.htm

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