Description

Although every library has outreach and support programs tailored to the needs of its primary users, some types of formal initiative are common to all. One of these is the orientation tour. In the press of the moment, an incoming graduate student may feel more productive privileging an extra half hour with new colleagues. However, if that's what you did, it's not too late to look for a PDF of the tour or a virtual re-enactment of it on the library's website. Sometimes a library schedules tours throughout the semester. Don't skip the tour.

Classes and Seminars

It is unlikely, however, that the orientation tour alone will give you skills sufficient to find, retrieve, analyze, and use the many complex resources your library makes available to you. Luckily, [librarians are committed to helping you](#) overcome barriers to effective research, and they offer a wide variety of classes, workshops, and seminars.

Here are some examples of what is being taught by U.S. academic librarians:

- Developing skills in library research
- Strategies for information management
- Mastering a particular computer application, like [Zotero](#) or [LaTeX](#)
- Collaboration tools
- Contributing to Wikipedia
- Newspapers and Newspaper Indexes

In addition to topics like these – which are properly aligned with a larger conversation on scholarly communication – subject matter experts are often available for lectures specific to a program or department. Sign up for a class on your library's website or ask your professors to schedule a library methods class.

Library Liaisons

Many libraries designate liaisons to serve as the primary point of contact for students, faculty and staff so that they can build and maintain strong relationships with academic departments. Some liaisons serve multiple departments while others serve only specific subdisciplines relative to what is called their "subject master's." In addition to their library master's degree, academic librarians hold at least a second master's degree and many have the doctorate, so as to better understand the reference, instruction, and collection development needs of their community. This is not to say that the liaisons are always in control of the institution's materials budget, but in some cases they are. Formal library liaison programs are an emerging phenomenon, with programs now in place at Harvard, Cornell, the University of Connecticut, and the University of North Carolina Greensboro, to name only a few. Find out who your department's liaison is and schedule an appointment.

Research Guides

In their role as managers of the data repository, librarians are continuously producing and revising research guides. Guides range in length from a simple 8 ½ X 11 sheet of paper or short web page to an entire published volume. They are available in both print and electronic formats. Research guides fall into three broad document classes:

- Skill guides — e.g.: Critically Analyzing Information Sources
- Course Guides — e.g.: Technical/Professional Writing for Mechanical Engineers
- Subject Guides — e.g.: Botany

I am using the Cornell University Library's breakdown here, but the terminology itself is fluid. What Cornell calls a "Skill Guide," Harvard calls a "How To Guide." What Cornell calls a "Subject," Stanford calls a "Topic," and so forth. Librarians budget in the time they need to stay abreast of current research as well as potentially shifting assessments of the canon. They receive and read copies of new works so that they can review them for bibliographic and other scholarly journals. See what guides are available in your library.

Because anyone can search Google and because the real estate occupied by millions of bound volumes is overwhelming, sometimes the perception is that academic research libraries and the services they offer are at worst superfluous and at best clunky. Nothing could be further from the truth. Your success depends upon your information literacy, which libraries are designed to advance.

Category

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