

# Engaging Faculty Empathy and Creativity into Collaborations

Presented at the California Academic & Research Libraries 2020 Conference

June 4-5, 2020

Virtual Conference

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## Abstract

Librarians support students outside the classroom and swoop in like super heroes for “one-shots” to get students “information literate.” Consequently, we often imagine all the conversations we’d *like* to have with faculty versus the ones we’re *actually* having. To expand instruction beyond the traditional “one-shot” model and collaborate with faculty in creative ways, I piloted a workshop titled *Faculty Research Freestyle: Developing Your Unique Research Freestyle to Share with Students*. It was an invitation to imagine research anew: “When thinking of freestyle, we often think of improvised dance, off-the-cuff lyricism, and intuitive creation. Research is also worthy of inventive possibilities!” The foundation of this “freestyling” was engaging faculty to empathize with students, while playfully gaining the confidence to create their own mini-one shots. For this session librarians will create and share other models of faculty engagement designed around empathy, as well as explore strategies to be more empathic questioners/listeners in the collaborative process.

## Introduction

After years of seeing students struggle with vague assignment prompts that asked students to find multiple scholarly journal articles without much context or scaffolded support, the instruction librarians at East Los Angeles College often asked ourselves: “When was the last time many of our professors conducted research using our library’s resources?” and “Do our faculty have first-hand knowledge of the potential roadblocks our students face when finding all these sources?” We continued offering faculty workshops on the various ways to embed information literacy into courses, but faculty mainly relied on one-shot orientations (if that) to get students research ready. It’s no wonder we often imagine all the conversations we’d *like* to have with faculty versus the ones we’re *actually* having; in other words, “we know how to help students with their research, so why won’t you stop, collaborate, and listen!”

To expand instruction beyond the traditional “one-shot” model and collaborate with faculty in creative ways, I piloted a workshop titled *Faculty Research Freestyle: Developing Your Unique Research Freestyle to Share with Students*. The workshop was a response to two critical questions: When was the last time you [faculty] put yourself in the role of your student navigating a research assignment for the first time? Furthermore, have you ever reflected on your research process as a means to finding your unique style of teaching information literacy skills? This workshop was my invitation to think about research anew: “When thinking of freestyle, we often think of improvised dance, off-the-cuff lyricism, and intuitive creation. Research is also worthy of inventive possibilities!” The foundation to all this freestyling was engaging faculty to empathize with students, while playfully gaining the confidence to create their own mini-one shots.

The structure of the workshop was straightforward. After introducing faculty to my definition of a freestyle (The art or act of researching without preparation or guidance and a way to show-off one’s research prowess), I put up a slide with an example research prompt. I then asked faculty to problem solve and essentially freestyle to see what sources they could find. I circulated, never gave out direct answers, and asked faculty to share their process informally. There was a lot of conversation happening as faculty eagerly shared their progress and/or expressed frustration at the difficulty of using databases. Following the research freestyle, faculty came together to discuss the challenges they encountered and the unique work-arounds they developed. Armed with this knowledge and insight into their students’ experience, they created their own lesson plans on how they’d structure a research orientation to help students prepare for a similar kind of assignment.

The success of this workshop is its improvised structure and its potential to be shaped by faculty experience. Every time I taught it, there was a new angle as some professors focused on popular sources, while others were interested in the convergence of digital and information literacy skills. In some cases they did this freestyling in the library computer lab and other times I brought Chromebooks to them, but the response was always the same. Despite their exasperation at navigating the tricky realm of online research, faculty always left empowered because they navigated the research process in their unique way and developed a plan for integrating information literacy into their

classes using these skills; more importantly, they left with a deeper appreciation for what ELAC students feel when encountering an assignment for the first time. The foundation to all this freestyling was creating an opportunity for faculty to practice empathy. In turn, I created more meaningful collaborative opportunities by standing back, watching/listening to faculty, and observing the diverse ways they navigated the library's website.

### **Engaging in Practice Activity**

For this Engaging in Practice session attendees crowdsourced and shared other models of faculty engagement designed around the freestyle model, as well as explored strategies to be more empathic questioners/listeners in the collaborative process. The discussion evolved around these questions: 1) How would you apply the freestyle model in your own practice and 2) Can you think of a way to apply this model to other library services like collection development, student instruction, cataloging, student equity, assessment, etc.? Participant responses can be found at [bit.ly/engaginfacultyempathy](https://bit.ly/engaginfacultyempathy). Slides for this session can be found at [bit.ly/3jTifVJ](https://bit.ly/3jTifVJ).

## References

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