Sarah Faye Cohen

# Taking 2.0 to the faculty

## Why, who, and how

If you've been to a conference, opened a library publication, or read any blogs in the last two years, you know the term "Web 2.0." As many articles in this and other publications have pointed out, 2.0 technology offers a great number of opportunities in our libraries, as well as our colleges and classrooms. Any user now has the chance to create, collaborate, or comment on a wide range of content on the Web. The classroom, along with the library's collections and resources themselves, are transformed into centers of creativity, collection, commentary, and critical thinking through tagging, sharing, bookmarking, podcasting... the list goes on.

Even more exciting, perhaps, is that students seem to be more committed to excellence when their work is available for anyone to peruse or comment on in the 2.0 world. However, as excitement and opportunity abounds, it seems we have neglected and possibly lost one of the most important constituents of our academic libraries: our faculty. As academic librarians, we need to continue our efforts to embrace technology in our libraries and with our students. However, educating, encouraging, and empowering our faculties about the power, the possibility, and the pedagogical opportunities of Web 2.0 is just as vital to library, student, and institutional success.

### Faculty and technology

In order to make a compelling case to faculty, librarians need to think about how faculty look at technology in the first place. While 2.0 provides a number of opportunities, as I mentioned above, we also have to open our eyes to the challenges that 2.0 brings, or is perceived to bring, as well. Many faculty view 2.0 in terms of four "Ds":

1. It is a *Distraction*. If students are using research computers for Facebook, I'm sure we can imagine what they are doing with their laptops during lectures. You only need look at a recent issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education*[1] for a professor articulating concerns and frustration about his students' lack of attention as they "fool around" on Facebook, YouTube, AIM, etc.

2. It is a *Disruption*. The amount of time that students spend "playing" with this "stuff" and looking over one another's shoulders perpetuates the idea for many faculty that 2.0 is a disruption to the purpose of academia: serious work, study, or a focus of academic pursuits.

3. It is *Disturbing*. With so much news surrounding predators, rivalries, and bullying, or concerns over privacy and the amount of personal information being scattered across the Web, or even the sheer amount of time that is devoted to it, 2.0 has potential to be seen as disturbing.

4. It is *Dumb*. Finally, and most importantly, to some faculty all of this just seems dumb. The point is not immediately clear to them, and they don't see the significance these technologies have in their teaching, let alone their lives or the lives of their students.

If librarians are going to work with faculty to see the potential and opportunity 2.0 offers, it is important for us to be aware of the argu-

Sarah Faye Cohen is information literacy librarian at Champlain College in Burlington, Vermont, e-mail: cohen@champlain.edu

© 2008 Sarah Faye Cohen

ments, concerns, and ways that faculty may view this technology.

However, perhaps librarians, especially those who work directly with faculty, should also ask themselves what assumptions we make about faculty and technology? Gloria Leckie points out in her seminal piece on faculty assumptions on the undergraduate research experience that "[Faculty] are used to sophisticated discussion about research with colleagues and graduate students, and in this environment, it is all too easy to make assumptions about the level of understanding possessed by undergraduates."[2] Leckie's point certainly works the other way: What assumptions do librarians make about faculty? More importantly, What assumptions do we make about faculty and technology? While some faculty might be experts in their discipline, are they experts in the fast-paced world of information or free, Web-based collaboration tools? Perhaps not.

Taking this question one step further, might we be well served to ask how faculty see 2.0 or technology as a whole? Many of us wouldn't be surprised to hear faculty say that they are wary of technology. Three reasons for this come immediately to mind: 1) faculty don't want to appear uninformed or unaware; 2) faculty don't want to waste valuable time; 3) faculty don't think they have anything to gain from it. But most importantly, many faculty don't think that technology is for them. It is for their students, or the younger crowd, but not for the teacher of physics, Milton, Third World development, or sculpture.

## Why faculty need help and from whom

Just as librarians are eager to share resources with faculty and help them see ways to use resources in their assignments, equally as important in today's academic environment is the need to engage faculty with technology. Why? Because it is clear that students expect faculty to use technology in their classrooms. According to the 2007 ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology, 61 percent of students agree or strongly agree that IT in courses improves learning. Observations from the study says, "Instructor skill with IT greatly impacts student perception of the value of IT in their courses . . . students view their instructors as fully accountable for whether IT has a positive or negative impact on their learning and engagement in courses. Students say that when used well by the instructor, IT can be an amazing learning tool. They also note that, when used poorly, IT detracts from the course and makes it difficult to focus on course content. Students suggest that instructors need stronger IT skills in general, as well as more training in how to effectively integrate technology and pedagogy."[3]

These expectations, combined with the four Ds outlined earlier and faculty's wariness of technology, put faculty in a precarious spot. They need better technology skills, and they need to integrate technology meaningfully into their classrooms. Where can they go for help?

Clearly I am going to suggest the library. But before doing so, I'd like to address why we are a better choice than the help desk or IT. In large part, the answer to this is that librarians are educators with an awareness of the pedagogical opportunities technology offers. While the help desk and IT are terrific when it comes to problems with software or hardware, that is not what we are talking about here. We are talking about advancing teaching and education. Such language and goals mirror many academic libraries' mission statements. But we are also talking about providing resources to patrons that meet their information and educational need. Thus it seems clear that rather than sending faculty off to the help desk or IT, librarians can, and should, offer faculty the same level of service and assistance that we offer all patrons when they are looking for resources.

Libraries are known on our campuses as places where your needs are met through creativity, knowledge, and service. That service model should extend beyond finding books and articles. It should also include introducing technology to our patrons, especially our faculty members. In order to do this effectively, we need to take a two-pronged approach to improvement.

## Ways librarians can help

The first is an inclusive and personal approach. Through understanding the position faculty are in and the way in which they understand or deal with technology, we need to remind faculty that 2.0 technology *is* for you. But equally as important is that not every technology needs to be used by everyone in the same way. Perhaps a faculty member is uncomfortable with the idea of Facebook. That's okay. There are a number of other technologies they might be more interested in. Our focus in introducing technology to faculty should mirror our focus in information literacy: it's not just about information, it's about the right information at the right time.

The same applies here: help a faculty member find a 2.0 application that works for him or her. As the faculty member explore sand plays with it, he or she will find others.

This notion also extends into another way of creating a personal and inclusive approach to improving faculty's relationship to technology: it's not just for your classroom. Show faculty how you use technology for professional development, or for keeping up with news and your personal interests, or for keeping in touch with old friends and new colleagues. Again, the idea is not to hit faculty over the head but to make 2.0 technology welcoming, friendly, and useful.

The second prong to improving faculty's relationship with technology is logistical. For many faculty, the vocabulary of technology itself is daunting: RSS, wiki, IM, Twitter, blog, podcast. Huh? Just as we try to rid our tutorials and subject guides of jargon, we need to do the same when talking about technology to others. One great way to achieve this is to let someone else do the talking! Common Craft's superb instructional videos "Explanations In Plain English"[4] are humorous, concise, and cover a variety of social media. Furthermore, these videos not only explain technology, but they simultaneously show faculty the value of YouTube videos for instructional use. What a great way to get a conversation going about YouTube, information sharing, and technology.

The other part of the logistical side to this effort is by finding out what faculty need. The true effort in this area comes from librarians. We need to collaborate with our Teaching and Learning Centers, visit department meetings, and go to office hours. Perhaps you've been shut down before by faculty members or whole departments. Try again. Faculty are vital members of our patron group: if you would try again with students, try again with faculty.

Once you are in the door, what are you going to offer? We can start by identifying small steps faculty can take. Perhaps it is just looking at blogs together in their discipline. Come in with a few to share and then set a time to come back and help them set up a blog of their own or show them how to keep tabs on blogs through RSS. We are there to collaborate with the faculty, not pontificate. Once you have their attention, celebrate their successes. For example, perhaps you invite a faculty member to contribute to a course-guide wiki. You can watch Common Craft's video "Wikis in Plain English"[5] and then make a change to the wiki together. If they do make a change, thank them. Show them how they can sign up for updates to changes on the page. These are small steps but they are steps in the right direction. It's a wonderful thing for faculty to try something new and to build a relationship with the library.

## Faculty are patrons too

The changes that take place in technology are fast-paced and challenging to keep up with, even for those of us who get paid to do so. The same is true in libraries. Libraries today are different than they were even a few years ago. In her blog post reviewing Henry Jenkins's talk at the 2008 ACRL Springboard Event, Melissa Mallon pointed out that "Jenkins stressed the need for librarians to act as information facilitators rather than curators of collections. . . . It's important for students to recognize that we do have up-to-speed technology skills and that we are available as a sort of coach or mentor for communicating via social networks."[6] This is a great point, but our focus when it comes to technology needs to be on our entire patron

group, not just students. We need to include, reach out, and encourage faculty, as well.

## Compelled to get started?

Here are some ways to start acting on your own campus:

1. Share your and your fellow librarians' successes and interests. Given the pace of change in both libraries and technology, does your faculty know what today's libraries are really about?

2. Get out there! Librarians are educators, teachers, and colleagues too. Go to a faculty event. Create a faculty event. Mingle, even if it is difficult for you.

3. Present, publish, and share among faculty, not just your library peers. Librarians are amazing at sharing ideas, thoughts, and applications with each other. But as I have tried to point out here, faculty need to be reached as well. Take a chance: submit a conference proposal for an nonlibrary conference about what you're doing to bring 2.0 to students.

2.0 technology has changed the landscape of computing, information sharing, and content creation. With it comes changes to how we collaborate, learn, and teach. That change needs to be shared with all of our patrons, and particularly our faculties. Faculty play many roles at our institutions. They are gateways to our students, partners in the educational process, and educators, but they are also patrons and learners themselves.

Librarians must use their skills as instructors and act as partners in the academic environment. 2.0 offers many opportunities for sharing, learning, and communicating. Let's use them to engage our faculty, both virtually and face-to-face.

## Notes


1. Mark Edmundson, "Dwelling in Possibilities," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 54.27 (14 Mar. 2008): B7.

2. Gloria J. Leckie "Desperately Seeking Citations: Undercovering Faculty Assumptions about the Undergraduate Research Process," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 22.3 (May 1996): 201–8.

3. "Observations—What Does This Mean?" ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology, 2007, Sept. 2007, www.educause/ecar

4. "Explanations In Plain English," www.commoncraft.com/show.

5. "Wikis in Plain English," www.commoncraft.com/video-wikis-plain-english.

6. Melissa Mallon, "My thoughts on ACRL's Springboard Event." Weblog post. ACRLog. 2 April 2008, acrlog.org/2008/04/02/my-thoughts-on-acrls-springboard-event/.


---

*("Library orientation..." continues from p. 471)*

services. A visible presence among faculty of library pens, tote bags, and similar products may not illuminate the real strengths of your library, but it will implicitly reinforce the library's presence on campus.

• **Always finish by offering a tour of the library.** There may be people in the audience who signed up in the expectation of one.

## Conclusion

Librarians can play a catalytic role in the process of persuading faculty that we are one of the library's best resources, capable of bringing a wide range of specialized knowledge to help solve any problem and advance any research agenda. To communicate that vision, librarians need to speak effectively and persuasively to faculty. We need to recognize that faculty constitute a fundamentally different audience than undergraduate and graduate students, with fundamentally different needs and outlooks. We have recently begun to address this issue in our orientation program for new professors. In the absence of formal literature on the subject, we have proceeded through trial and error. We modify both content and style of the presentation every year, trying always to improve the presentation on the basis of past experience. We have found the points outlined above consistently effective, and offer them as a useful first step in a relatively unexplored but important subject.