Assessing Library Instruction for First-Year 1201 and 1202 Students

A Report on SHU Libraries’ Summer Assessment Grant, prepared by Marta Deyrup, Beth Bloom, & Lisa Rose-Wiles
Past Assessment Practices

- LibQual (mid 2000s) survey of users’ satisfaction with overall Library services
- Followed professional Information Literacy (IL) best practices
- Informal feedback from professors & students
- University Life quizzes
- Initial attempts to create a rubric for scoring information literacy as part of the Core
- Surveys of students by individual librarians
Impetus for change

- The Google Grant, extensive research on how students do library research, affirmed by presentations and conversations at local, national, and international conferences and meetings
- Changes in how the library profession regards and evaluates IL
- One-shot IL instruction model and incomplete coordination with the goals of Freshman English do not advance reading and writing skills addressed by English 1201 and 1202 assignments
- Increased value placed on assessment at SHU.
Questions we asked ourselves

- What do we want to assess?
- And more importantly, what do we want students to be able to do?
- What and how best should we teach them (typically in a single library instruction session!)?
- Can we start scaffolding English 1201 and 1202 instruction sessions (despite varied assignments)?
- How do we assess our effectiveness?
Goal of the assessment grant

- Work with our grant partners from the English Department jointly to improve and evaluate freshman student research skills

- Use the results to inform and further develop our Freshman English instruction
Objectives of the assessment grant

- Devise an assessment plan that integrates the New Jersey Library Association Progression Standards and the ACRL Standards for IL into the English Department’s assessment rubric of freshman critical thinking and research skills.

- Align our instruction to support the English Department’s Outcomes Statement for First Year Writing Courses.

- Assess learning outcomes by examining end-of-the year student portfolios, quizzes, and assignments.
What are the current IL standards?

- Informed by the ACRL (Association of College and Research Libraries) standards. The NJLA standards provide very clear definitions and goals and made sense to the English Department as a rubric
- [NJLA progression standards link](#)

**STOP PRESS!** ACRL is preparing a new “[Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education](#)”
1. At the end of spring 2013 semester, four librarians joined members of the English department to assess English 1201 and 1202 writing portfolios.

2. Rebecca Thompson (English department) led development of “Desired information Fluency [IL] Outcomes for First Year Undergraduate Students” with specific goals for English 1201 and English 1202 students.

3. Standard assignments and quizzes: pilot in Fall 2013
   a) Quizzes broadly distributed based on IL standards
   b) Standardized library worksheet in participating English 1202 classes
   c) Other instructors revised their assignments or used the worksheet.
Instruction session goals, English 1201.
Students should understand:

- That information resources accessed through the library website are paid for by the library and typically cannot be found through the open web.
- How to find and use general sources (research guides, encyclopedias, etc.) to begin the research process.
- How to use SHUsearch to locate records for books and articles.
- Basic techniques for limiting and evaluating retrieved sources.
- Differences and similarities between sources (e.g., a peer-reviewed journal article vs. a magazine article).
- How to tell if an item (whether a book or article) is available at SHU and how to find the item if it is.
- How to retrieve articles from SHU Search results, including how to log in from off campus.
Instruction session goals, English 1202.

Students should:

- Learn the basics of database searching in several discipline specific databases (*compared with SHUsearch*)
- Learn the difference between keyword, phrase and subject searching and the concept of controlled vocabulary
- Learn how to use more focused, discipline-specific search terms to broaden or narrow search results
- Learn how to use alternative search terms and combine multiple terms or phrases to find more relevant results
- Understand the differences between abstracts, book reviews, peer-reviewed articles, and popular sources
- Learn how to retrieve sources from a citation
- Learn how to use database tools to cite retrieved sources.
Quiz results: common issues revealed

- Ignoring/misunderstanding instructions (e.g., searching everything when directed to search Credo reference or just books)
- Confusing resources (e.g., library catalog vs. encyclopedia vs. dictionary)
- Confusing formats (e.g., books/eBooks; scholarly articles vs. magazines)
- Uncertain how to limit results (e.g., to scholarly articles)
- Difficulty providing citations (e.g., cut & paste in URL instead)
- How to get full text of articles (<50% selected “click on pdf symbol”)

- Over half the students thought they could get the full text of BOTH book and scholarly article results they had found while doing their library assignment ON GOOGLE; 61% thought they could get a least one!

n = 69; mean score 70% (range 26% - 100%)
Six instructors agreed to participate, but only two returned the worksheets to us (4 x English 1202 classes, n = 66 students)

Several English 1201 sessions also participated but did not return worksheets to us (more have since come in)

Library instruction sessions were closely geared to the worksheets and matched to IL goals

And the results were a HUGE improvement over the quiz results.
Question: Why do you think general web sources might not be the best place to find information for your essay?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not reliable/ not credible/ anyone can post</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not academic / not scholarly</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free vs subscribed databases / &quot;you get what you pay for&quot;</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biased, commercial, ads</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient or irrelevant information</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other reason</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Didn't get it</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Almost all correctly described scholarly articles
  ◦ e.g., peer reviewed, written by experts in field, reviewed by experts, found in library
Almost all identified appropriate subject databases for their searches
Common questions students had were: which databases should I use? how should I narrow searches? how should I find results on a topic? What to do if I don’t find results? ... “How do I make my research quick but effective”? Over 45% of respondents gave “Boolean searching” as the most useful thing they learned.
What did students find most challenging?

- Finding good sources: 38%
- Narrowing results: 13%
- Choosing best sources: 18%
- Choosing good search terms: 24%
- Other: 7%
Our results so far indicate ...

- First year student IL skills are poor—both technically and conceptually
- Many do not understand the difference between types of format or types of resources
- They struggle to choose good keywords/search terms (but do not necessarily recognize this as a problem)
- Students do not understand the conceptual process of research (browsing, thinking, exploring, THEN writing).
Keyword Issues

- Keyword searching before research topic is established
- Assumption that phrases will work in place of keywords
- Poor search syntax
- Students don’t know how to combine keywords
- Lack of integration of keywords into a search strategy
- Keywords are problematic unless research question is clearly articulated.
What to do next?

- Adopt the forthcoming **ACRL framework** as our IL model
- Key is participation of English Department in developing assignments that stress IL skills
- Librarians need to work with teaching faculty to coordinate library instruction with syllabus
- Reinstate librarians’ instruction of Boolean logic
- Focus library orientations on the purpose and process of research
- Rethink how to address the purpose of keywords
- Focus on information structures (book, article, etc.)
Information literacy combines a repertoire of abilities, practices, and dispositions focused on expanding one’s understanding of the information ecosystem, with the proficiencies of finding, using and analyzing information, scholarship, and data to answer questions, develop new ones, and create new knowledge, through ethical participation in communities of learning and scholarship.

The Frameworks aims to … “position information literacy on a higher plane, as an integral part of the learning process within disciplines, and across them”
THANK YOU
We welcome your questions & feedback

Special thanks to:

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- Rebecca Thompson, MA, MLS
- Dr. Mary Balkun, Dr. Nancy Enright, Dr. Edward Jones, Dr. Kelly Shea and the English department instructors and students who participated in our pilot project.

Please contact us if you are interested in exploring IF in your classes..

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