Not Just For Now: Developing a Longitudinal Study of Information Literacy Skill Development and Retention

Rodney A. Briggs Library

Project Team

Team Leader: Kellie Meehlhause, Instruction Coordinator
Team Members: Jayne Blodgett, Assistant Library Director
Nancy Helsper, Director of Institutional Research
Dr. Roger Rose, Associate Professor of Political Science
Dr. Tisha Turk, Associate Professor of English

Project Process

Survey Design
- Created three surveys with similar questions. Administered online through Qualtrics.
  - WLA pre-survey before first library instruction session to gauge preliminary skills. Then, a post-survey at the end of the semester measures short-term retention.
  - After completing WLA, participants will complete an annual follow-up survey to measure IL skill improvement and correlation with library instruction frequency.
  - Each survey consists of multiple choice and open-ended simulation questions to cover both knowledge of IL concepts (quantitative analysis) and research behavior (qualitative analysis).
  - Post- and follow-up surveys have an additional section regarding recent research habits.

Test Run (Spring 2015)
- Used 2 WLA classes for pre/post surveys. Students currently enrolled in Senior Seminar classes (recruited through their professors) completed the follow-up survey.
  - Attendance was lower than expected for WLA pre-survey (25 out of 36 anticipated) and post-survey (14). 27 participated in the follow-up survey.

Introduction

Question/Problem
The freshman writing course, ENGL 1601: Writing for the Liberal Arts (WLA), currently requires each section to spend a minimum of two class periods in the library, learning about various library resources and developing information literacy (IL) skills necessary for efficient research. Because this class is required for almost all incoming students, the inclusion of these sessions entails both an increase in library instruction sessions offered and that a majority of freshmen will develop a baseline competency of IL early in their college careers.

Briggs Library is particularly interested in students’ retention and use of information literacy skills as they progress through UMM. Specifically:
- How does their library instruction experience in WLA affect their ability to think critically and conduct research in the semesters/years after course completion?
- What IL skills are retained, and which are not?
- How does additional library instruction in upper-level classes allow further skill development?
- What long-term or short-term effect does library instruction have on students’ confidence as researchers? (Not addressed in test run.)

Literature Review
For a complete citation list, visit https://goo.gl/T58zNk or scan the QR code below.

What we learned:
- It has long been accepted that library instruction positively impacts academic performance (Selegan, et al., 1983) and library use (Person, 1981).
- Partnering IL instruction with freshman writing offers a natural gateway to research readiness and engagement (Armstrong, 2003; Fain, 2011).
- As technology and information needs change, additional library instruction is vital to reinforcing appropriate research strategies (Julién, et al., 2013) and introducing advanced, subject-specific methods (Ferrer-Vinent, et al., 2011).

Lessons Learned

Full Reports
- WLA Pre-Survey
- WLA Post-Survey
- Senior Seminar Survey

Survey Results
- Evident improvement between WLA pre-test and post-test answers, demonstrating short-term efficacy and retention. Post-test also consistently noted the usefulness of library instruction on research assignments.
- Improvement also evident in Senior Seminar student responses, though it is less apparent.
  - Since only 3.85% of participants took WLA, the influence of early library instruction still isn’t clear.
  - Now that we know the potential end result, we need to focus on the process from Point A to Point B.

Assessment Process Reflection
- Communication and marketing are crucial. Student buy-in is just as important as faculty buy-in.
  - Contact students directly through Qualtrics and collaborate with faculty to further get the word out.
  - Add incentive for participation (e.g., entry into annual drawing).
- Add additional question measuring confidence levels (e.g., How confident are you of this answer?). This will also lessen concern that students will memorize the answers over time.
- Actual study should consider student’s major/minor. Despite early instruction, how does IL skill development differ between departments?

Next Steps
Beginning in Fall 2015, Briggs Library will conduct a four-year panel study. All students enrolled in WLA that semester (approx. 350) will be invited to participate. A call number is used to:
- Locate a book in the library
- Check out a book
- Identify the book’s publisher
- I don’t know.

While searching a library database for articles on social networking, your search returns 1,200 results. List one strategy to refine your search.

Word Frequency [Senior Seminar Survey]

Word Frequency [WLA Pre-Survey]

Word Frequency [WLA Post-Survey]

Acknowledgements
This project is part of the program “Assessment in Action: Academic Libraries and Student Success” which is undertaken by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) in partnership with the Association for Institutional Research and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities. The program, a cornerstone of ACRL’s Value of Academic Libraries initiative, is made possible by the Institute of Museum and Library Services.