Understanding the Liberal Arts Through Book Displays at Hofheimer Library

Research Question:
Do students in the First Year Experience (FYE) program who complete the library’s Frames of Reference/Book Display assignment identify the Frames in a later survey more frequently than those who did not complete the assignment?

Literature Review:
Most of the library-related literature about First Year Experience programs focuses on information literacy instruction directed towards this population. Our program differs significantly due to its focus on the Frames of Reference that are the disciplinary perspectives that make up Virginia Wesleyan College’s General Education requirements (Aesthetic (A), Historical (H), Natural Science Lab (L), Quantitative (Q), Institutional & Cultural Systems (S), Literary (T), Ethical Values & Faith (V)). One of the goals of VWC’s FYE program is to help students understand the liberal arts. Understanding the Frames of Reference as part of the liberal arts education is part of that understanding.

Methods:

11 of the 35 FYE instructors adopted the assignment

Students who did the assignment took a survey at their next class meeting

All FYE students were given the same survey at the end of FYE

The FYE book display assignment asks students to identify books or chapters that approach the display topic from each of the Frames. Results from the students who did the assignment were compared with those who did not. For the students who did the assignment, results of the first and second survey were compared. No significant loss of understanding was experienced over time.

Contributions:
VWC students have difficulty understanding the Frames of Reference that are key components of the General Education curriculum. The Frames represent the variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives that make up a liberal arts education. The library is uniquely situated as the multidisciplinary center of the College, and as such, can provide a holistic approach to the Frames. As the chart shows, the book display assignment helps first-year students understand the Frames of Reference, particularly the Aesthetic, Quantitative and Systems. An understanding of the Frames is necessary for effective selection of courses and performance on the Senior Integrative Experience (SIE) that requires students to integrate at least two of the Frames. Through the College’s assessment of the SIEs, it is clear that seniors have difficulty integrating the Frames. By reinforcing an early understanding of the Frames in FYE, we hope that students will be better prepared for the SIE.

Recommendations:
• In April, results of the survey were reported at the FYE instructor workshop for those teaching in fall 2015. Because we were able to demonstrate that the assignment helps students understand the Frames, we anticipate that more FYE instructors will use the assignment this fall. We plan to reduce the number of displays and place them further apart to facilitate more students using a display at the same time. We will arrange comfortable seating around the displays to encourage the students to sit down with the books because we observed some students attempting to do the assignment without picking up the books.

• We have mounted a sample display so that faculty can try out the assignment before they decide to include it.

• For fall 2015, we will create a Google Doc to share with FYE instructors to help manage the number of students doing the assignment at the same time.

11 of the 35 FYE instructors adopted the assignment

Students who did the assignment took a survey at their next class meeting

All FYE students were given the same survey at the end of FYE

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.