Linking information literacy with first-year writing in learning communities

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BACKGROUND

• Learning communities have the potential to increase undergraduate student GPA, retention, and satisfaction. [1]
• Increased levels of instructor collaboration with a librarian have been shown to correlate with better attribution, evaluation, and communication of sources on student writing assignments. [2]
• Taking a credit-bearing library information literacy course has been shown to correlate with increased graduation rates. [3]
• Students taking an English composition course and a library information literacy course linked within the same learning community report that the library information literacy course supports their work in other classes. [4]
• Compared to students taking an English composition course with an embedded librarian, students taking an English Composition course and a library information literacy course linked within the same learning community show increased student persistence, successful course completion, and student performance on an information literacy post test.[5]

PURPOSE

Our purpose was to replicate the successes of previous efforts and to collect data that could address questions that were not directly addressed by previous studies.

Our team aimed to address the following questions:

• Do students feel that the first year writing/library information literacy learning community effectively and appropriately supports their course work?
• What do students learn in the library information literacy course that they are able to apply in other courses?
• Do students who take the first year writing/library information literacy courses in the learning community format show any difference in performance on their final writing assignments when compared to students who took the first year writing course without library information literacy course?

METHODS

Creating Learning Communities

Four sections of English 120 and four sections of Library 100 were linked within learning communities for the Fall semester of 2015. Learning communities each had a separate theme: pre-nursing, social sciences, education, and humanities & arts. Instructors were informed of the linkage in the Spring and were encouraged to collaborate on assignment development informally and through scheduled workshops.

Assessing Student Perceptions of the Information Literacy Course

Students in the learning community sections of library 100 were surveyed with the following questions:
• What did you value most/least about your assignments in library 100?
• What is something you learned in library 100 that you applied in another course this semester?
• How much do you agree/disagree that library 100 effectively and appropriately supported your course work in English 120?

Assessing Performance on Final Writing Assignments

Pairs of writing instructors and librarians assessed student final writing projects using a rubric to evaluate five dimensions of student work: Response to the assignment, argumentation, organization, critical use of sources, and style/grammar. Through collaboration with librarians, the “critical use of sources” category was expanded into three subcategories, including integration of sources and citation in addition to critical use of sources.

RESULTS

• 63 students in the learning community courses responded to the survey.
• 89% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the library course effectively and appropriately supported their English course.
• Open ended survey responses strongly point toward databases and source evaluation techniques as things learned in the library course that were applied in other courses.

CONCLUSIONS

• Including a library information literacy course in a learning community with first year writing can support student learning.
• More work is needed to identify best practices for facilitating collaboration and community-building among instructors in learning communities.
• More work is needed to further learning community collaborations with introductory courses in other disciplines.

REFERENCES


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