

Teaching Students to Evaluate E-Reference Sources with Moodle Forums

Michele Van Hoeck, Cal Maritime
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Texas A&M University at Galveston

California Maritime Academy



- Vallejo, California
- Established 1939 to train merchant marine officers
- Joined California State University system in 1995
- 850 students

LIB100: Information Fluency in the Digital Age



- Semester-long , 2 units
- Required for two majors
- Approx. 24 students per class
- Primarily freshmen
- Covers all five ACRL Information Literacy standards



What's an online forum
doing in a real-time,
in-person class?

ACRL Standard 3.6

The information literate student validates understanding and interpretation of the information through discourse with other individuals, subject-area experts, and/or practitioners.

Outcome 2: Participates in class-sponsored electronic communication forums designed to encourage discourse on the topic.

ACRL Standard 5.2

Follows laws, regulations, institutional policies, and etiquette related to the access and use of information resources.

Outcome 1: Participates in electronic discussions following accepted practices (e.g. “Netiquette”).

Moodle



CAL MARITIME

You are logged in as [?](#) [Switch role](#)

[iLearn](#) ▶ 2107-MACMP-LIB-100-SEC1-1109

People

- Participants

Activities

- Assessments
- Assignments
- Choices
- Forums**
- Questionnaires
- Quizzes
- Resources

Search Forums

Weekly outline

LIB 100: Information Fluency in the Digital World

This class will provide students with an introduction to research, information management and computing technology skills that are fundamental for success in the college environment and beyond. Students will explore the research process, develop efficient search methodologies in an online environment, and learn to critically evaluate resources. Simultaneously, students will receive an orientation to the use of Microsoft Office programs, with special attention paid to information management, critical-thinking and problem-solving.

- [News forum](#)
- [Syllabus](#)
- [Pre-Survey](#)
- [Midterm](#)
- [Learning Styles Survey - Anonymous](#)
- [Post-Survey](#)

First two forum assignments (worth 5%)

My Fears

- Students wouldn't do it
- Students would post inappropriate comments
- Students would post minimal, rote comments

What Actually Happened

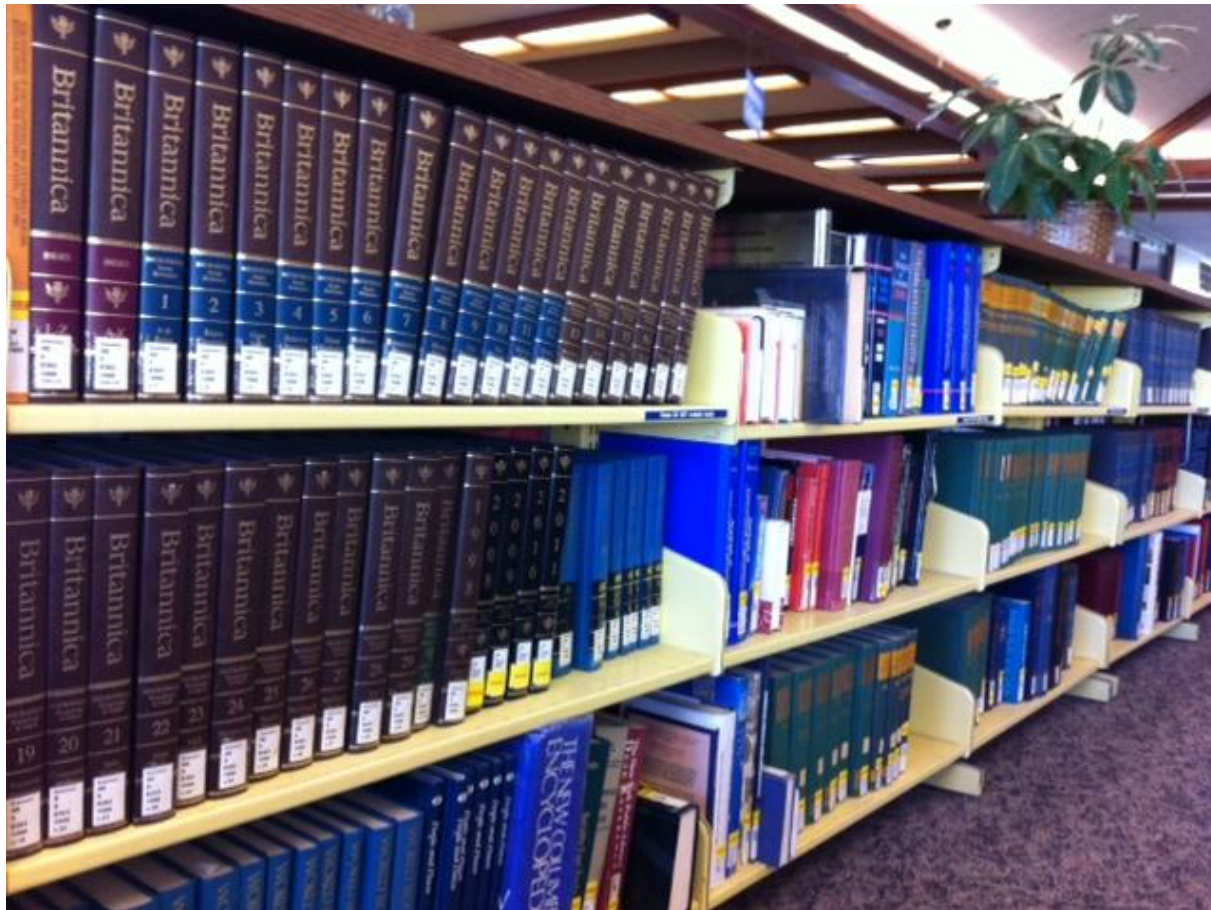
- 85% participation rate
- Nothing inappropriate
- Most students posted substantial comments that showed engagement with readings

Unexpected benefits



- Insight into student experiences and preconceptions
- Jump-started in-class discussion

Challenge: Teaching students to ~~find~~ & evaluate subject-specific reference



Wikipedia



“Rolls Royce of Reference?”

“Considering the expense of these titles, the download figures are disappointing for a large university with about forty thousand students, 25 percent of whom are postgraduates. Clearly many of our online subject encyclopedias are not earning their keep.”

Reference & User Services Quarterly, 2010

Fishing Hole Scouting Report

1. Paired students up
2. Gave each pair a topic to background in class
3. Assigned one recommended reference source, to be compared to Wikipedia
4. Students wrote evaluations in forum



Topics

- Malpasset Dam Collapse
- Admiral Nelson
- Earthquakes in California
- Alternative Energy
- Role of Women in modern Japan
- Hyundai Merchant Marine Corporation
- Global Warming
- Marine Propulsion
- Confucianism in South Korea
- Ballast Water and Invasive Species
- Whaling in Antarctica

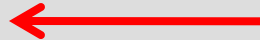
Evaluation Criteria

- Successful location of answers
- Currency
- Ease of use
- Any other pro/con comments

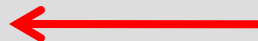
Fall 2010

[Lonely Planet Japan vs. Wikipedia](#)

[Ei Compendex vs. Wikipedia](#)



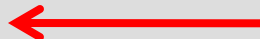
[New York Times vs. Wikipedia](#)



[Beyond Failure vs. Wikipedia](#)

[Guide to Marine Mammals of the World vs. Wikipedia](#)

[Mergent Online](#)

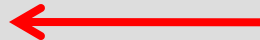


[Oxford Dictionary of World Religions vs. Wikipedia](#)

[CIA World Factbook vs. Wikipedia](#)



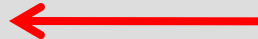
[CQ Researcher vs. Wikipedia](#)



[Encyclopedia of Maritime History vs. Wikipedia](#)

[Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands vs. Wikipedia](#)

[Factiva vs. Wikipedia](#)



Results/Assessment: Fall 2010

- About 1/3 of students preferred the librarian-approved source over Wikipedia
- About 1/3 preferred Wikipedia
- About 1/3 saw benefit to using both



And... I learned how students actually use the reference sources I recommend!

Overall, student preferences were **independent of format.**

Some students considered print sources easier to use:

“I think the book, Lonely Planet Japan was more helpful than Wikipedia. I first searched Wikipedia and it took me awhile to find relevant information. Wikipedia had information that was on a more broad scale. My partner used the book first and she found information right away.”

Others considered print too slow:

“You can't exactly go Ctrl+F on a book and I actually had to look for my keyword in the index. We still do that in the 21st Century?”

Corresponds to recent research on attitudes towards e-books:

Students and faculty broke down into four types:

- Book Lovers
- Technophiles
- Pragmatists
- Printers

College & Research Libraries, March 2011

Students also commented on:

- **Organization**
 - ...very easy to use as it was organized in tabs and sub-tabs for quick access to precise information.
- **Audience**
 - If you read Wikipedia from a professional's point of view, then it would not satisfy their needs.
- **Source authority**
 - The pros about the site is that it's not just edited by anyone with a computer.

What needed refining?

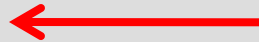
- Students only learned about one source
- To benefit from the “knowledge-base” created by forums, more information needed to be shared in class during debriefing.
- A few reference sources just didn’t work for this exercise.

Spring 2011

[Handbook of Energy Efficiency vs. Wikipedia](#)

[Admiral Nelson](#)

[CountryWatch vs. Wikipedia](#)



[Factiva vs. Wikipedia](#)



[Beyond Failure vs. Wikipedia](#)

[CQ Researcher vs. Wikipedia](#)



[Ei Compendex vs. Wikipedia](#)

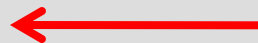


[wiki comparison](#)

[Dictionary of Marine Technology vs. Wikipedia](#)

[Encyclopedia of Maritime History vs. Wikipedia](#)

[Mergent Online vs. Wikipedia](#)



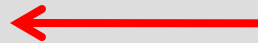
[Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands vs. Wikipedia](#)

[Times Topics vs. Wikipedia](#)



[Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands vs. Wikipedia](#)

[US Dept. of Energy vs. Wikipedia](#)



Results / Assessment: Spring 2011

- About 2/3 students preferred the non-Wikipedia source
- About 1/5 preferred Wikipedia
- Again, preference was independent of format

What does the Fishing Hole exercise accomplish?

- Introduces students to reliable, authoritative alternatives to Wikipedia
- Gives them a successful experience using a non-Wikipedia source, either print or e-reference
- Acknowledges that Wikipedia is a contender, in terms of convenience

Why were online forums
more effective than take-
home bibliographies?



Project Information Literacy


A large-scale study about early adults and their research habits



One of the major findings:

“... evaluation is far from being a solitary task for most students. When conducting research for course work, students most frequently turned to instructors (49%) for help. During research for personal use, students relied on support from friends and/or family (61%).”

Moodle forums are social



Still much work to do to
make e-Reference as
findable as Wikipedia.

Questions or Comments?

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