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Connecting With Students: Information Literacy and Personal Librarians

by **Denise A. Garofalo** (Systems and Catalog Services Librarian, Mount Saint Mary College, Newburgh, NY)

Abstract: *Integrating information literacy instruction and meeting Middle States requirements drove a Personal Librarian pilot in ENG 101 classes, a pilot conceived, developed, and implemented in just three short months. Librarians at **Mount Saint Mary College** (Newburgh, NY) turned to technology as a means to deliver content on certain key points, and overall our bumpy and rushed implementation led to a positive collaboration with teaching faculty, activated campus-wide clamor for Personal Librarians, and actually imparted information skills to freshmen.*

We began our journey towards Personal Librarians via concern over retention rates and Middle States requirements. **Mount Saint Mary College**, a four-year private liberal arts college, began investigating High Impact Practices for first-year programs as a means to raise retention rates (Kuh, 2008). A Task Force selected a Passion Course Model for a First Year Experience (FYE) Program, and information literacy would be a component, with each Passion Course having an assigned personal librarian. But as time progressed, issues such as the lack of academic learning outcomes doomed this model, and our attempt at systematically addressing information literacy skills in a freshman-focused course were stalled.

The librarians decided to pursue our goal of integrated information literacy in an established course on our own. We knew we wanted our course to be focused at the freshman population, and if we offered a number of instruction delivery formats to accommodate various learning styles, we could address time and consistency concerns. Most importantly we wanted the course to make research and the librarians seem a little less imposing and more personal — we wanted students to feel comfortable contacting us for research assistance. So we decided to take the Personal Librarian (PL) model proposed for the FYE and pair it with a freshman-focused course, hoping to establish a PL program to create a culture of connection to the library.

Personal Librarians have been utilized as a means of outreach to the freshman student population. Universities such as **Yale**, **Barnard**, **University of Richmond**, and **Drexel** have led the way by developing programs to help raise awareness about the library, reach out to students, assist with research, and provide a contact person for all things library related (Dillon, 2011; Freedman, 2011; Henry, Vardeman, & Syma, 2012; Nann, 2009). We chose to develop an information literacy program around the Personal Librarian moniker. Our program would be similar to the PL pioneers in that we are targeting the freshman population, reaching out to students, and hoping to develop a personal connection. But our goal is different — to systematically teach information literacy concepts to our freshman students.

In order to successful launch our PL program pilot, we needed to pair it with a freshman-focused course that all freshman students were required to take, ensuring that we were targeting the freshman population in a systematic way. Information literacy skills, specifically a research component, needed to be a part of the course. And most importantly, we needed a course where the teaching faculty would be supportive of our collaboration.

After consideration, the course that met all of those requirements was ENG 101: College Writing. The faculty was willing to work collaboratively with us, and we were off and running, with only three months to plan, create, orient, and implement. After establishing outcomes, we identified objectives that not only align with Middle State's Profile of an Information Literate Person (Middle States, 2003, p. 8) but were appropriate for the course.

Profile of an Information Literate Person*	Information Literacy Outcomes for ENG 101
• Knows where to start looking for information, is aware of a broad range of information resources • Is familiar with major reference collections in his or her discipline and selects from them appropriately • Conducts electronic database searches effectively • Is able to select key points from retrieved information and summarize them, rather than simply repeating material from research • Evaluates and explains or resolves contradictory information	• Students are aware of information resources made available by the college, both physically in the library building and virtually via the library Website • Students can use scholarly reference material to find background information on a topic • Students can use the basic search features of multi-disciplinary research databases to find information in periodic literature • Students can break a topic into its component concepts and can identify appropriate search terms for each concept • Students understand the criteria used to evaluate information sources
***Middle States Commission on Higher Education, Developing Research & Communication Skills Guidelines for Information Literacy in the Curriculum**	

Denise A. Garofalo

Denise A. Garofalo always wanted to be a librarian. She is currently the Systems and Catalog Services Librarian at **Mount Saint Mary College** in Newburgh, NY, but has worked in various special, school, academic, and public libraries in the northeastern United States. She has consulted with libraries on technology, information processing, and digitization projects, has served as an adjunct professor at the Department of Information Studies at the **State University of New York** at Albany, and is a trustee for the Marlboro (NY) Free Library. She has served on various library committees at the regional and state level and given presentations at various conferences. She writes a column for the *Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship* and reviews for *Library Journal, School Library Journal, American Reference Books Annual,* and *Technical Services Quarterly.* She authored the book, *Building Communities: Social Networking for Academic Libraries* (Chandos, 2013). When not busy with technology in libraries, she enjoys science fiction, bicycling, and hiking with her husband and son. She is a contributing author to the recent **IGI Global** title, *Robots in Academic Libraries: Advancements in Library Automation.*

Much consideration was given to how to integrate these objectives into themes or topics that we could then develop content around. We were aware of **Kasowitz-Scheer** and **Pasqualoni's** statement that teaching IL skills "requires a shift in focus from teaching specific information resources to a set of critical thinking skills involving the use of information" (2002, p. 1). In addition, in discussing information literacy and high-impact practices, **Riehle** and **Weiner** state that "instructional and program planners should try to prevent a disconnect between information literacy and the content of the course or program" (2013, p. 137).

Discussion centered on how to best employ information literacy instruction while

remaining aware that students may presume they already know everything they need to conduct research. As **Emmons** and **Martin** (2002) state, "these students come to campus highly computer literate, not realizing they are information illiterate" (p. 545). We finally decided to group these objectives into six larger themes or topics:
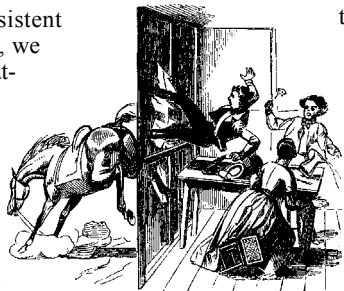
- Developing a Topic and Identifying Key Terms
- CREDO vs Wikipedia: Identifying Background Information
- Popular vs Scholarly Articles
- Identifying Components of Citations
- Database Searching
- Evaluating Websites

With these topics identified, we turned our attention to the delivery of instruction.

Since we hoped to not only teach IL skills but also to establish a rapport with the students, we knew that we needed to develop in-class instruction, but there were a number of factors that impeded relying on in-class instruction as the sole delivery method. ENG 101 had an already tight curriculum, and the faculty could not sacrifice six class sessions to librarian in-class instruction. And given we are only five librarians and there were nearly 20 sections of ENG 101, in order to dedicate one class session to each of the six topics, we would have to commit to many additional in-class instruction sessions and coordinate the timing of those with our already heavy instruction demands for other courses. Technology seemed be a solution that could help deliver some of the instruction outside of regular class sessions.

We determined the best solution would be to address one topic in-class and the rest via online video tutorials. And since database searching can be a challenging topic with many facets, we selected it as the topic for our in-class session. We looked at research on online tutorials as a delivery method for information literacy skills, and found guidance from studies by **Stiwinter** (2013) and **Su & Kuo** (2010). In addition, we investigated PRIMO (Peer-Reviewed Instructional Materials Online Database) to become familiar with the components of successful online tutorials.

To better present a consistent experience for our freshmen, we decided to develop an integrated library guide for our PL pilot. We, like **Adebono-jo**, "see LibGuides as a great addition to our library instruction program" (2010, p. 411). The idea of embedding our guide in a Learning Management System (LMS) as Murphy and Black discussed (2013) was not an option — many of the ENG 101 faculty did not use the campus LMS. So we created a libraryguide with a welcome page describing the program, librarian-specific tabs for the content, and profile boxes for each librarian with their contact information. We incorporated the tutorials and other program components in this guide, so there would be just one place the students could go to find the content. Each tutorial was a subpage on the library guide, so we could display or hide the tutorials as needed during the course of the semester, thus ensuring students would view the tutorial and take the quiz at the proper point in the curriculum.

We chose Adobe Captivate to develop the tutorials, as we had access to this software. Our goal was to keep the length of each tutorial to under five minutes, to keep the student's attention. We created a short quiz for each tutorial that would not only assess learning but also verify that students had viewed the tutorial. Our Online Learning department provided support with publishing our tutorials on YouTube and linking them into our library guide as well as with using Google Apps for Education to create the quizzes and automate grading.

Our tutorials had a uniform template and look, and were created with Microsoft PowerPoint. The quizzes were developed in Microsoft Word, with multiple choice answers. For instance, for the Scholarly vs. Popular Articles tutorial, each question has the same two answer choices — Scholarly or Popular. The questions are really statements, (such as, "These articles are written for the general public," or, "These articles are written by author(s) with academic credentials"), and the student then selects Scholarly or Popular as their answer for each statement.

For the assessment aspect of the quizzes, we gathered the student's name, course number, instructor name, and librarian name to verify the section the student was in. Then we used a logic formula to obtain the quiz grade, which essentially said, "if this response equals the key give the student 1 point." Then the sum of those points was calculated to obtain the student's score. Information in the grading spreadsheet could be sorted by Librarian, Instructor, Course, or Student. Since all librarians and instructors had access to viewing this data, the sort function was very useful to locate grading information.

Consistency remained a concern throughout development. In particular, we knew that with multiple sections and five librarians, we would be hard-pressed to safeguard that each student receives the same instruction. But we were confident that by choosing to use online tutorials and quizzes that we developed together, we were delivering consistent learning across class sections. We wanted to keep our instruction consistent and ensure that the student experience varied as little as possible from librarian to librarian. The tutorials maintained that every student viewed the same instruction and heard the same information.

As we rolled out the PL pilot, we discovered that the main challenge we faced in regards to the tutorials and quizzes was student participation. We had hoped that with our visits, the faculty reminders, email reminders, and links to the libraryguide in the online syllabus and on the library Website, students would complete the tutorials. Student participation started off strong; 326 students were enrolled in ENG 101 and 285 students took the quiz for the first lesson, Developing Topic Identifying Key Terms which equaled 87% participation. But from that high point participation steadily decreased, and out of five tutorials, our fifth and final tutorial had the lowest participation rate--68% of students completed the quiz associated with the Evaluating Websites Tutorial. Between these, tutorials for CREDO vs. Wkipedia: Finding Background Info, Popular vs. Scholarly, and Identifying Components of Citation ranged between 80% to 73% participation.

In general, we saw less and less interest in the assignments until the end of the semester, when we received inquiries regarding whether or not students could "make up" the quizzes. Our team is considering when and if the tutorials and quizzes should become unavailable, and make this standardized across our courses.

Students preformed relatively well on the quizzes. For most of the quizzes the scores averaged around 4 to 4.5 (out of 5). Students performed the poorest on the second quiz (Credo vs Wikipedia). We will have to review this tutorial and the quiz questions associated with it to see if any improvements can be made.

In order to gather input from the students on their perceptions of the PL pilot, we sent email invitations to all of our ENG 101 students to complete an online survey designed to garner their opinions on the personal librarian program. Out of 326 students, 85 responded, giving us a 26% response rate.

We asked students to respond to five statements utilizing a Likert Scale that ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Lastly, we asked for any additional comments or feedback. For the question, "I felt the tutorials helped prepare me for my classwork," responses varied, but were overall positive:

- 69% of students agreed or strongly agreed to the statement "I felt the tutorials helped prepare me for my classwork."
- 19% felt neutral, neither agreeing nor disagreeing with that statement.
- 12% felt that the tutorials did not help prepare them for their classwork.
- This tells us that our tutorial content did align with ENG 101 coursework. We can generalize that students saw connections between the concepts taught through the tutorials and their ENG 101 assignments.

The student comments ranged from helpful to insightful to frustrating:

- "….has nothing to do with my English class."
- "I thought that my personal librarian was very helpful, especially when helping me find my research. I thought that she was a great help!"
- "I wish there was an easier way to find the Website."
- "She was very helpful when she visited the classroom and taught us how

to use the databases. It came in handy when I wrote my research papers."

We also polled the teaching faculty for their opinion on our PL pilot. They shared that:

- Calling a librarian our "personal librarian" appealed to the students and they seemed more inclined to seek that person out for help.
- I would like to see more integration of tutorial lessons into class lessons.
- I plan to do more in class to make use of the tutorials.
- I think that getting started on the tutorials right away was good, and the coordination of the class visit on databases was effective.
- I noticed that some of my students did find high-quality Websites for their research, which made me think that emphasizing smart Websource evaluation works well with this generation of students.

The librarians provided opinion and insight on the pilot, too:

- The online tutorials kept our time commitment to the PL program from overwhelming us and allowed us to have time to continue BI [bibliographic instruction] sessions in classes other than the PL ENG 101 classes.
- The time, or lack thereof, we were given for implementation.
- Consistency in content that the teaching faculty cover.

Overall, we successfully integrated technology into our delivery of information literacy instruction content to our freshmen in ENG 101. We achieved an increase in research consultations, and we established collaborative relationships with the teaching faculty in our Arts and Letters Division. Faculty in other disciplines across campus expressed their desire for a personal librarian for their classes. We plan to build on this successful pilot as we create new online tutorials and expand into the College's FYE program in the Fall 2014 semester.

Additional research from **Denise Garofalo** on libraries, technology, and the academic environment appears in the **IGI Global** publication, *Robots in Academic Libraries: Advancements in Library Automation.*

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