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## You Don't Have to Cover Everything: Replacing the One-Shot with Competency-Based Library Instruction

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# **YOU DON'T HAVE TO COVER EVERYTHING: REPLACING THE ONE-SHOT WITH COMPETENCY-BASED LIBRARY INSTRUCTION**

**AMANDA PEACH AND ANGEL RIVERA**

During the Fall 2015 semester, the Hutchins Library Instruction Team implemented an information literacy skills competency assessment pilot in response to shifting priorities in our campus General Studies curriculum. For several years, the General Studies (or GSTR) 110 class—required of all first-year, first-semester students—had comprised the bulk of our instruction efforts each fall. A library one-shot, with a focus on evaluating information and locating sources to support a nearly universal documented essay assignment, was built into every section of the course. After librarians observed that GSTR 110 faculty were beginning to transition away from the “mini-research paper” to focus instead on alternative writing assignments, such as creative writing and timed writing prompts, our standard bibliographic instruction session felt increasingly irrelevant. Coupled with our frustrations with the limitations of one-shot instruction sessions in general, we felt the time had arrived to scrap our old approach.

The General Studies curriculum may have changed, but students’ need for information literacy skills hadn’t; we knew this based on their performance on a modified version of the nationally recognized HEDS Survey of Research Practices, taken prior to their arrival on campus. During the summer of 2015, before they would begin their Fall 2015 semester, incoming freshmen were emailed a set of questions from the HEDS Survey, which served as the initial assessment of their competency in information literacy skills. The assessment was administered by the office of the Dean of Curriculum and Student Learning, who sent the survey link to students via campus e-mail. The survey evaluated students in the following areas: Finding Resources, Evaluating Resources, and Knowing When to Cite.

We enjoyed an impressive 85% initial response rate to the incoming survey, which provided much-needed insight into the skill level of the majority of the incoming class. We theorize that students were so highly responsive because of who was asking them to participate: namely, a recognized authority figure within the college—the Dean—whose office had previously communicated with them. Having an ally in the administration was invaluable; if the survey had originated from the library, we doubt it would have been as successful. Further helping the response rate was the fact that while students were never told that a response was required, they were also never explicitly told that it was voluntary, either.

## **INSIGHT FROM THE SURVEY**

Survey results from that first year showed that 26% of incoming students initially passed Finding Resources, 35% passed Evaluating Resources, and 58% passed Knowing When to Cite. Based on these results, it was clear that most students needed an intervention to address information literacy deficiencies in one or more skill areas. In previous years, we would have attempted to address these concerns, as well as introduce students to the library’s services and resources, in the obligatory GSTR 110 one-shot library session. Rather than continue to try and cram hours’ worth of content into a single 50-minute session, however, we decided instead to create focused, content-specific workshops which students could attend on their own-time, rather than during class, to develop competency in the areas they needed. Workshop attendance would be voluntary because we wanted students to take initiative for their learning. We wanted students to pursue this opportunity on their own, much like they might seek out assistance writing a paper at the campus writing center or seek research assistance in a one-on-one reference consultation in the library. Most important to us, workshops would be tailored to the individual needs of the students. One of the major obstacles we repeatedly encountered during one-shots was the wide variation in information literacy skills among our incoming students. We were forced to teach towards

the middle, boring those who were already knowledgeable and losing those who were struggling. The workshop model, however, with its focus on just one content area at a time, would allow us to see only those students in need of an intervention and even then, only for those areas in which they had demonstrated deficiencies.

## **ROLE OF THE TEACHING FACULTY**

At Berea College, GSTR 110 instructors also serve as academic advisors to the students in their section for their first year. During the fall of 2015, we turned to those faculty for support in carrying out the pilot. It was our hope that instructors, when acting in their advisory capacity, would discuss the survey results with the students and encourage them to sign up for the workshops. We provided instructors with a class roster during the Fall Faculty Conference detailing which students had passed the assessment of basic information literacy competency skills and which ones needed to attend one (or more) of the three workshops. If instructors did not attend the Fall Faculty Conference, class rosters were sent to them via e-mail. Four weeks into the semester, we reached out to instructors again and provided them with an updated class roster listing which students had passed the assessment and which ones still needed to attend a workshop. Throughout the semester, faculty received communications from both the library and the Dean's office regarding the status of the pilot and at semester's end, instructors were provided with a final updated class roster to view their class's overall performance in the pilot.

Faculty reception of the pilot varied widely, and we found that some—in a show of support for the program—required their students to attend the specific workshops only in the case need was demonstrated based on the survey assessment. Other faculty required all of their students to attend all of the workshops, regardless of need, while still others brought in their entire class at once for one or more workshops. Such faculty support and enthusiasm was appreciated, even though it contradicted our intention that students attend the workshops voluntarily. We also found that when entire classes came in for workshops, student performance on the post-assessment suffered. Results were so poor, in fact, that we chose not to lead workshops for entire classes after that first semester. Additionally, a few GSTR 110 instructors chose not to participate in the pilot at all, with some claiming they already taught these particular information literacy skills in their classes. The library offered those instructors the option of offering the post-workshop assessments to their students so the students could demonstrate their competency as well as document the data; none of these instructors chose that option.

After the first semester of the pilot, our expectations regarding the role of the GSTR 110 faculty changed. In the spring, students who had passed GSTR 110 moved onto the next course in the sequence, GSTR 210, with new instructors who were no longer simultaneously their advisors. We needed to continue to communicate with those students who had yet to demonstrate competency in their skill areas, but it no longer made sense to reach out to their 110 professors. Instead, we delivered personalized postcards to the offices of the GSTR 210 faculty, with cards for each student in their section. For those few students who passed all sections of the initial HEDs assessment, the card congratulated them and let them know that they were certified as having displayed competency in the basic information literacy skills. For those students who had not passed one or more parts of the initial assessment, the library gently recommended those students attend workshops to remedy the needs identified by the survey. All that the GSTR 210 instructors needed to do was hand out the cards to the students and let them be responsible for addressing their own learning needs.

### **Figure 1: Sample Letter Sent to Students**

We liked this new approach so much that in the fall of 2016, we chose to no longer rely on GSTR 110 faculty to supervise their students' participation in the workshop program. Instead, during the first week of classes in Fall 2016, we hand-delivered a packet to each GSTR 110 classroom which contained individualized letters for each student in their section, detailing which workshops were recommended to them based on their assessment scores, and then simply asked the faculty to pass the letters out (see Figure 1). We were concerned that once GSTR 110 faculty were no longer actively encouraging—or sometimes even requiring—their students to attend the workshops that attendance would decrease. While that did prove to be true, the difference wasn't catastrophic. During 2015-2016, more than 70.5% of the students who demonstrated a need for at least one workshop attended one, whereas in 2016-2017, only 36.8% did so. However, when we adjusted the numbers to remove those students who were forced to attend as a part of a class, the total number of individuals who attended 2015-2016 workshops voluntarily decreased from 70.5% to just 43.5% (see Table 1), which meant that the true number of students who attended of their own volition only decreased by 6.7%.

**Table 1: Students Needing Workshops Who Attended At Least One, by Pilot Year**

## WORKSHOP IMPLEMENTATION

Workshops were offered during the first eight weeks of the Fall 2015 semester at a wide variety of times, in response to the fact that our college is a labor college where all students must work and many of their jobs are scheduled during the traditional work day, as are their classes. Since workshops were being attended during students' free time, they needed to be scheduled when students were actually available. By year two of the pilot, we only offered workshops in the evenings/weekends because daytime workshops were so poorly attended. In the spring of each pilot year, workshops were only offered during the first four weeks of the semester, in recognition that most students who were going to take advantage of this model would have already done so in the fall. For the Fall 2015 semester, workshop size was capped at 15 students, but we never had more than 13 who registered and the typical size tended towards just five. Even if only one student showed up, we conducted the lesson for that one student. We found that the bigger the workshop size, the more likely it was that a student would fail the post-assessment. Since that defeated the purpose of our intervention, we decided in the spring of 2016 to limit the number of registrants to 10 and then, finally, we capped it at only five students per workshop for 2016-2017.

Workshops were 30 minutes in length, which included a short post-assessment at the end. Workshops employed a variety of active-learning techniques, including think/pair/share, discussion, and polling. After the first semester, we changed the location of workshops, moving from a classroom setting, where a student could sit in the back and disconnect, to the much smaller/more intimate reference consultation areas near the reference department, which seat only six people, making it nearly impossible for a student to hide or fail to participate. After our change in workshop size/location, we experienced a noticeable uptick in pass rates. If students passed the quiz, they were certified as having demonstrated competency in that area—if they did not, it was recommended the student meet with a librarian one-on-one. Students needing this assistance could schedule a time using the library's "Schedule an Appointment" link on the library's homepage, which is the same calendar we use for research consultations. Whether they passed or failed, their instructors were notified via email of the results. Students could sign up for any or all workshops online via the library's website. A link to the workshops calendar was prominently displayed in the center of the library's homepage during the weeks that workshops were running and upon selecting a time, date, and workshop title that was convenient for them, students were brought to a registration page. The scheduling process was managed using LibCal, a part of Springshare's LibGuides CMS suite.

## RESULTS

The Instruction Team invested a considerable amount of time in planning and leading workshops. There were 114 workshops scheduled and divided between three instruction librarians during the 12 weeks that workshops were running during the 2015-2016 pilot year. During 2016-2017, the number of workshops increased significantly as a result of our reducing our workshop sizes; we had to increase total workshops offered to 185 in 12 weeks in order to accommodate students. Such a large commitment of time and human resources meant that other duties took a back seat out of necessity; most notably, we had to limit our availability for one-on-one reference consultations, to which we typically each dedicate five hours per week. We also proposed not conducting other library instruction sessions during workshop weeks, but that suggestion was met with some resistance. It was exhausting, but in the end, we believe the tradeoff to be worth it in terms of student learning achieved. In April, all students were surveyed once again by the Dean's office, using the same modified set of questions from the HEDS Survey. This final post-assessment demonstrated notable improvement across all three content areas. The number of students passing Finding Resources increased by 32%, those passing Evaluating Resources improved by 24%, and those passing Knowing When to Cite rose by 29% (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Student Pass Rates on Survey Sections, Initial Assessment vs. Final Assessment**

## DISCUSSION

While we consider the pilot a success overall, there are several changes we implemented that improved the experience, as well as additional changes still needed. We plan on keeping the cap on workshop sizes as well as continuing to limit workshop offerings to evening/weekend hours, because those changes support our teaching pedagogy and the availability of the students, respectively. We also plan to continue contacting students directly by bringing letters to their GSTR 110/210 classes, rather than pushing that task to their faculty. In 2016-2017, we offered as many seats as there were possible students who could fill them, which left us with an unsustainable workload of 185 workshops spread out among 3 faculty over 12 weeks. We will not offer so many workshops in the future; the reality is that not every student who should participate will. In addition to meeting our hopes of substantial improvement across all information literacy areas, the pilot had another unintended but positive consequence: it afforded us the chance to meet approximately half of the first year students in an intimate setting, which allowed us a chance to promote our one-on-one consultation service and let students know that they could think of us as their personal librarian. Many of them took us up on the offer and met with us for one-on-ones in their second semester when taking the research-intensive GSTR 210. Finally, having between 36-43% of all freshmen students voluntarily show up for workshops on information literacy topics—on nights and weekends, no less, and with no extrinsic reward—was an Instruction Librarian's dream come true.

**Images for Tables and Figures (Editor will put in body of the text later)**

**Table 1: Students Needing Workshops, and of those, Percentage Who Attended At Least One, by Pilot Year**

<b>Students</b>	<b>2015-2016</b>	<b>2016-2017</b>
<i>Students needing at least one workshop, as determined by initial assessment</i>	83.5%	79.7%
<i>Students attending at least one workshop, whether on their own or as part of a class</i>	70.5%	36.8%
<i>Students attending at least one workshop on their own</i>	43.5%	36.8%

**Table 2: Student Pass Rates on Survey Sections, Initial Assessment vs. Final Assessment**

<b>Sections Passed</b>	<b>Initial Assessment (Summer 2015)</b>	<b>Final Assessment (April 2016)</b>
<i>Finding Resources</i>	26%	58%
<i>Evaluating Resources</i>	35%	59%
<i>Knowing When to Cite</i>	58%	87%

**Figure 1: Sample Letter to Students**



Dear: [Student Last Name], [Student First Name]

B#: [Student B-Number]

Greetings from the library.

We noticed you missed parts of the GSTR 110 Information Literacy Competency Assessment during the fall term of 2016. (Items labeled "Passed" are items already completed. Items labeled "Attend Workshop" need to be completed):

**Finding Resources: Passed**

**Evaluating Resources: Attend Workshop**

**Knowing When to Cite: Attend Workshop**

The information and lessons from the assessment are a crucial component for success in GSTR 210. In order to successfully complete all components of the IL assessment, we are providing you with another opportunity to participate in the assessment and get the information you need to succeed. You can do this by enrolling and completing the workshops for the topics you have not completed at this point (the ones labeled "Attend Workshop" above).

To enroll, simply copy the link below on your browser. You can also visit the library's homepage directly and click on the link for "Workshops." From there, you can sign up for a workshop time that is convenient for you. Please make sure you complete this by Friday, February 12, 2016.

URL for library workshops: <http://berea.libcal.com/calendar/workshops>

URL for the library homepage: <http://libraryguides.berea.edu/>

If you have any additional questions, you may visit the library's reference desk and ask for one of the librarians, or you can e-mail [angel.rivera@berea.edu](mailto:angel.rivera@berea.edu)

Sincerely,

Your Reference Librarians