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Peer Mentors and Writing Center Tutors: What our collaborations taught us about serving the SJSU Freshmen Students

Peggy Cabrera

San Jose State University, peggy.cabrera@sjsu.edu

Robert Bruce

San Jose State University

Francis E. Howard

San Jose State University, francis.howard@sjsu.edu

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Peer Mentors and Writing Center Tutors: What our collaborations taught us about serving the SJSU Freshmen Students

Peggy Cabrera, Robert Bruce, and Francis Howard

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library
San José State University
{Peggy.Cabrera, Robert.Bruce, Francis.Howard}@sjsu.edu

Introduction

The Library Outpost, a satellite office of the campus's Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library, seeks ways to reach out to First Year students who are new to writing research papers. One of our goals is to meet the First Year students on their own turf. Since the Peer Mentors and Writing Center tutors have peer relationships with the First year students, we want to learn how we can collaborate with them to provide services to the First year students. We surveyed the Peer Mentors and Writing Center Tutors to assess their perceptions of their own research skills, and their students' research needs to guide the services and workshops offered by the Library Outpost.

Statement of the Problem

1. How can librarians support the research needs of First year students? Library instruction classes are offered as one-shot sessions in First year writing/research classes.
2. How can we support the research skills of Peer Mentors and Writing Center Tutors? Peer Mentors and Writing center Tutors work directly with First year students and have an on-going relationship with First year students.

Methodology

We surveyed the Peer Mentors & Writing Center Tutors in Spring and Fall 2007. This data was used to design a workshop and handout to train the Peer Mentors during Fall 2007. The Writing Center tutors were unable to participate in the training session. Spring 2008 we modified the survey to request feedback from the Peer Mentors and Writing Center Tutors on the workshop needs of the freshmen students.

Results

- Peer Mentors suggested that library instruction be student centered, organized into small groups with active learning activities for students.
- Peer Mentors and Writing Tutors assessed their research skills as moderate or high.
- Topics requested by Peer Mentor decreased for all areas except for literature searching and non-library related topics.
- In addition to traditional library topics, Peer Mentors suggested workshops for freshmen students on writing and adjusting to college life and campus activities.
- Most of the Peer Mentors did not use the workshop handout in their work with their students.

Conclusion

1. Design workshops on student generated topics to meet their current information needs. Include student centered, hands-on activities.
2. Design workshop handouts to cover one major topic for use by all students.
3. Design an information literacy assessment tool to gauge student information literacy knowledge.
4. In addition to live instruction, provide workshop training through a variety of methods including webcasts, podcasts, handouts, and blogs.
5. Include workshop assessments in instruction sessions to measure student learning.

Related Research

- Hardesty, L. (ed.) (2007). *The role of the library in the first college year*. University of South Carolina: Association of College & Research Libraries, Division of the American Library Association, and the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience & Students in Transition, University of South Carolina, 2007.
- Honkimaki, S., & Tynjala, P. (2007). Study orientations in different tutoring environments: University language students' first two years. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 15(2), 183-199.
- Terrion, J.L. & Leonard, D. (2007). A taxonomy of the characteristics of student peer mentors in higher education: Findings from a literature review. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnerships in Learning*, 15(2), 149-164.

SJSU websites:

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library : <http://www.sjlibrary.org/>
SJSU Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library Strategic Plan :
http://staff.sjlibrary.org/service/admin/sjsu_strategic.htm#plan
Academic Success Center : http://www.sjsu.edu/asc/about_asc/
Muse Peer Mentors : <http://www.sjsu.edu/muse/peermentor/>
Writing Center : <http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter/>
First Year Experience : <http://www.sjsu.edu/ugs/students/firstyear/>