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Database Demolition: Exploding the Scope of Information Literacy and Leading Through Pedagogy

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Abstract

The presenters demonstrated how to become pedagogical leaders on campus by moving away from traditional database demonstrations and expanding the scope of information literacy topics covered in instruction sessions. The panel reviewed existing constraints on library instruction, changing trends in the field, and presented a new model for one-shot instructional workshop planning with an emphasis on engaging critical content areas, technology-forward active learning techniques, and increased impact on campus through the implementation of a coordinated vision. The panel shared successful lesson plans implemented at their home institutions, and attendees worked in groups to discuss their own critical content areas and potential lesson plans.

Introduction

Despite a documented legacy of librarian-led instruction that features varied aspects of information use (Hopkins, 1982), librarians on many campuses today continue to be cast in limited roles as providers of "bibliographic instruction." Many lesson plans continue to emphasize database search and retrieval and often don't wade into meatier aspects of information literacy. Taking the plunge into instruction that strategically steers away from resource search and retrieval to focus on higher-order information literacy skills can help transform the perception of librarians. Creative instruction broadcasts and promotes librarians as pedagogical leaders on campus while also supporting the full development of students as information literate.

Description

Current constraints on library instructors include a common narrow interpretation of the existing Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) Standards for Information Literacy, the one-shot model in which a librarian provides a single workshop session to students enrolled in a semester-long course, faculty expectations regarding the focus of library instruction, a lack of training in educational techniques, and the coordination of multiple instructional librarians.

The climate of library instruction is changing. Research has shown that students struggle most not with the search and retrieval process of library-licensed academic databases but rather the higher-order thinking required for academic research: narrowing a topic, evaluating the

quality of sources, and using sources to create a valid argument (Head & Eisenberg, 2010). In addition, the implementation of discovery tools is dramatically changing (and in some ways simplifying) the search and retrieval process. The ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education Task Force is currently revising a new framework for information literacy instruction with an emphasis on threshold concepts, such as "scholarship as communication," a development with major potential to shift the emphasis of librarian-led instruction (2014).

Key Points

During this session librarian presenters shared insight into using the instructor role as a tool to promote library leadership in higher education as well as practical tips to redesign information literacy instruction. The model presented includes designing instruction and instructional programs around three core areas:

- Critical content: Library instruction is often tethered to database demonstration. Expanding the scope of instruction to include the depth of information literacy learning outcomes, higher-order thinking skills, and critical thinking can elevate the relevance and engagement of instruction.
- Technology-forward and active learning techniques: Librarians have the opportunity to learn about and integrate pedagogical techniques that are on the forefront of instructional practice in higher education. Active learning, problem-based learning, instructional technology and flipped instruction are all examples of techniques that can be integrated into information literacy instruction.
- Vision: Though librarians may feel constrained by the limitations of information literacy (one shot instruction, faculty demand for database demonstration, etc.), developing a clear and passionate vision and conceptualizing all instruction as part of a larger, coordinated program can support the depth and quality of instruction. Strategies to develop and communicate this vision might include curriculum mapping and developing a program vision/mission statement.

These three elements can support librarians as pedagogical leaders on their campuses by creating more active, participatory classrooms, even when constrained to the one-shot dynamic. During this session, librarian presenters shared how creative instruction has impacted their role as leaders on campus as well as successful topics, lessons, and activities.

The presenters provided examples of workshops they have implemented that are geared toward a mix of learning outcomes and a range and depth of topics. Materials for these workshops, such as presentation slides, lesson plans, and handouts, were published online under a creative commons license for session participants to adapt for their own work. The example workshops were as follows:

- [Occupy APA - A Citation Sit-in](): At Holy Names University, librarians provide a two-hour APA "protest." The session seeks to help students understand how to "think like APA" to identify source types and apply citation formatting; to differentiate between common formatting rules and more challenging citation problems; and to use resources efficiently. The session uses problem-based learning, audience response technology, and group work techniques.

- Train-the-Trainers: At Whittier College, librarians provide specialized training for students enrolled in a Peer Mentor program that connects experienced students with first year students enrolled in the freshman writing seminar. The session begins with an introduction to threshold concepts and information regarding the research habits of first year students and concludes with students being asked to roleplay a mentoring scenario in which a first year student is struggling with a particular threshold concept. The session also asks students to reflect upon their own research habits, especially how those habits have matured in the course of their academic program, and how that learning experience can be applied to mentoring first years..
- Roleplaying Researchers: At Holy Names University, the library hosts a "one-shot" session for senior biology and sports biology students as part of their capstone research course. The students roleplay as scientists submitting work to academic journals. They work in collaborative groups to determine a designated journal's submission policies, accessibility, relative prestige, and other elements a researcher might consider, in the hopes that participants will have a better understanding of the information marketplace and how research articles are published.
- Dissecting the Literature Review: At Holy Names University, a librarian was embedded in a graduate Education Course on literature review. In one information literacy session, students were introduced to the concept of "research as a conversation" and used elements of this theme to work in groups and deconstruct a literature review in preparation for their own research and writing. The session used think-pair-share, group work, and reflection techniques.
- Evaluating Resources Redux: At Whittier College this past year, the library offered a workshop series in both the Fall and Spring semesters. Part 4 of the workshop was an hour long session on evaluating resources that goes beyond the typically CRAAP (or similar) analyses of material by asking students to develop their own criteria for evaluating sources and then applying that rubric to material provided by the librarian. Additionally, the librarian provides three alternative rubrics for analyzing information in terms of its format, content, and use. The session employs group work, sharing, online voting technology, and class discussion to determine a "master rubric" for evaluating sources.
- From Topic to Thesis: In this one-shot workshop provided at Holy Names University, combined sections of an interdisciplinary general education course on the pre-modern world are guided step-by-step on developing a general topic idea into a focused thesis statement for a research paper due later that semester. Students initially work in pairs and later share their research questions with the class.

After featured examples were shared, attendees then built on the panel's examples by working in groups to share and construct their own innovative lesson plans, sharpening their ideas with the input of their peers. Attendees brainstormed and shared ideas for critical content areas that might be explored and then fleshed out the three core areas (critical content, technique, and vision) of a specific lesson idea. Participants left with a conceptual framework and concrete ideas to bring back to their home institutions.

Resources:

- Presentation slides and materials for the example workshops are available at this website: http://hnu.libguides.com/databasedemolition

References

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