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Building on Success: Establishing an Information Literacy Program at Portland State University

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Scavenger hunts don't serve to familiarize students with library resources. And with that statement, the nucleus of an instructional program was formed. At Portland State University, library instruction has not been required, though the need for students to understand research methods and tools has been recognized throughout the campus by faculty and administrators alike. Efforts by teaching faculty to force students into the library through the creation of "scavenger hunts" and similar exercises served to confuse students and frustrate librarians, as few or no skills were being imparted through the exercises. Librarians within the PSU Library recognized the need and opportunity to improve research skills, promote information literacy, and work with teaching faculty to create relevant instruction that served the students' needs.

PSU Instruction Team: Judy Andrews, Sharon Elteto, Elizabeth Howell, Faye Powell and Reza Peigahi.

To advance these goals and to equip our students with the requisite skills for the future, the PSU Library Instruction Team (the Team) chose to adopt Information Literacy Standards created by the ACRL (ACRL, 2000). The Team established an information literacy program with the University Studies (UNST) department, which oversees the general studies curriculum.

The structure of University Studies is highly conducive to realizing our information literacy goals. Since 1994, Portland State University has required incoming freshmen to participate in one of many yearlong, multidisciplinary courses called Freshman Inquiry. Sophomores are required to take three sections on different themes that introduce them to ideas, research, theory, and perspectives in the various subject areas. Juniors take clusters of classes within a discipline. Seniors enroll in Capstone, a six credit, community-based course where they apply their knowledge in a team context. The courses are designed to present increasing levels of difficulty in a controlled context, granting the Team an ideal opportunity to pursue our goal of adopting the ACRL standards at all levels of application.

In the Fall and Winter terms of 1999/2000, the Team proposed to the University Studies Council an instructional program involving all incoming freshmen in a series of library sessions incorporating information literacy standards. We identified these student learning goals for freshmen:

- Use the online catalog to find the Library of Congress numbers for books by author and/or title.

- Use the online catalog to find the call numbers for books by subject.

- Use the online catalog to find the call numbers for journals.

- Locate items on the shelves.

- Define a search and execute it on one or more appropriate online databases.

- Design a search strategy using Boolean operators

- Determine which online databases are appropriate for their research topics.

- Interpret a citation of an item retrieved from an online database.

- Locate an item cited in an online database.

- Identify various kinds of reference materials available at the library, such as subject encyclopedias, handbooks, etc.

Our plan was accepted by the Freshman Inquiry Council and we presented it to the University Studies faculty the beginning of Fall 2000.

We determined that instruction would be tiered to ensure that all freshmen would participate in three library sessions: one conducted by student mentors and two conducted by librarians. The first session, consisting of a library tour with written assignments, would be performed by the Freshman Inquiry student mentors. Library staff

would train the student mentors and provide them with a script for conducting the tour; the written assignments would be sent to the Team for assessment. The second session, taught by librarians, would consist of a 50 minute session dealing with the PSU Library OPAC, Vikat. This session would be customized to the specific course content, and examples tailored to the information needs of the students. The final session, also taught by librarians, would consist of a 75 minute database session focusing on the students' information needs, and providing print and electronic resources relevant to the content of the course.

We designed the sessions to be part lecture and part hands-on, with the students using wireless laptop computers for at least 50 percent of the session. To observe students as they complete worksheets enables us to individualize instruction to meet the differing skill levels and learning styles. Students prosper from immediate feedback on their techniques and strategies, and are encouraged to use the librarian as an information consultant. In addition, because computer skill levels can vary significantly among the students, from those who have had little computer training or experience to those who are adept, the librarian has the opportunity to coach students in the use of some of the basic computer navigational skills as well as advise students on which databases are appropriate for their topics.

Although data cannot be analyzed conclusively until the end of Spring term, it appears that most of the mentors conducted library tours as directed, although not all required students to complete the written assignment. Compliance for the online catalog session has been less encouraging, as only 11 of the 30 Freshman Inquiry faculty have brought a total of about 300 students for training. Many faculty members feel the session is unnecessary; it should be obvious to students how to use the catalog. On the other hand, compliance has been good for the online database/research session. During Fall and Winter terms, we taught a total of 520 students in 26 sessions on using online databases and other library resources. When we return to the University Studies Council with our annual report, we will suggest that a firmer commitment can be gained from the faculty by formalizing the library component into the program's assessment initiatives.

The Team developed several instruments to measure success in achieving the program's student learning goals, meeting the teaching goals of the instructors, and reducing library anxiety among students. We've developed ru-

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brics to apply to the hundreds of worksheets we have collected from students and are in the process of analyzing them. We already can assert that the assessment instruments have not only demonstrated increased student skills and confidence, but have been invaluable in promoting collaboration with faculty. Faculty respond favorably to questions concerning their teaching goals and their satisfaction with the sessions, encouraging them to integrate library instruction into other courses. Using assessment as the medium, we are planting the seeds of a collaborative network that will advance information literacy.

In our initial proposal to University Studies we defined information-literate students as those who could:

- Determine the nature and extent of information needed

- Access the needed information effectively and efficiently

- Evaluate information and its sources critically

- Incorporate selected information into one's knowledge base

- Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose

- Understand the ethics and legality of the use of information (ACRL, 2000)

The Team intends to approach the University Studies Council in the near future with a proposal outlining more advanced activities to target sophomores through seniors. We will go beyond the more rudimentary skills to teach students evaluative and critical thinking skill. We will seek to become more involved in the development of course content to help ground assignments in viable research queries.

Through our instruction program for Freshmen Inquiry, the PSU Library Instruction Team is poised to launch information literacy goals into the whole of the core curricula at Portland State University. We believe that students' information literacy skills will increase and student research will improve as librarians collaborate more with the teaching faculty. ▯

References
Association of College and Research Libraries, 2000. *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education Standards: Performance Indicators, and Outcomes.* American Library Association, Chicago. Available: http://www.ala.org/acrl/ilstandardlo.html