

**Action Research Project:
Restructuring the Information Literacy Instructional Modules at the University of North
Carolina Asheville to Comply With the Change to a Liberal Arts Core (LAC) Model and to
Address Student and Faculty Feedback**

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LIS 600 - Fall 2013

Issues and Question

On November 7, 2013, the University of North Carolina Asheville (UNC Asheville) Faculty Senate approved the new Liberal Arts Core (LAC) general education requirements. It was announced on November 15th to the faculty and staff that the university would discontinue its current model of Integrative Liberal Studies (ILS, or as it is known colloquially on campus the “cluster” model) and all students will graduate under the aforementioned LAC model as of the fall semester of 2014. Instead of separate designated Information Literacy Intensive (ILI) coursework as offered under the ILS model, all academic majors are now required to show information literacy within the major’s required courses.

The conundrum facing D. Hiden Ramsey Library is two fold: the fact that our prior model of instruction worked directly with the ILI course instructors rather than working with each of the academic majors combined with a change in staffing structure due to two retirements within the public services department. Comments from students and faculty in two surveys conducted over the past year also point to a needed and desired shift in instruction delivery methodology. The question at hand is: **How do the information literacy instruction offerings at D. Hiden Ramsey Library need to change and grow with the changing educational structure and needs of UNC Asheville?** To answer this question to the best of our abilities, we first need to examine how the needs and requirements of the information literacy offerings are analyzed and subsequently develop modules based on both those datasets and the previous survey data available.

Literature Review

This is not an uncommon issue among academic libraries. In fact, the most recent edition of *College & Undergraduate Libraries* is devoted entirely to the issues surrounding assessing information literacy offerings in small academic libraries, entitled *Proving Value and Improving Practice: Assessment Strategies for the Small Academic Library*. Each of the nine articles within Volumes 3 and 4 cover a portion of the methodologies and reasoning behind information literacy instruction in the academic library setting. In the introduction, Jill Gremmels from Davidson College and Christopher Millson-Martula from Lynchburg College assert that traditional means of assessment of library and information literacy services no longer suffice in defending our offerings and truly delineating what types of services our faculty and students need to learn. “Assessment is not just about proving how good the library is. It is also a means to see if what we are doing achieves our goals and make changes if it doesn’t. Closing the loop by applying what we learn is an essential step” (Gremmels & Millson-Martula, 2013, p. 239).

Of particular interest to this project was Brook Stowe’s case study of the new ILI assessment system at Long Island University - Brooklyn. In “Designing and Implementing an Information Literacy

Instruction Outcomes Assessment Program”, he provided details of both the benefits and shortcomings of their particular assessment model and a fantastic literature review of years worth of on information literacy assessment. Their library staff faced a common foe that many academic libraries encounter; dwindling numbers of instructional faculty, dropping from a staff of twenty in 2009 to nine in 2011 (only four of which typically taught ILI coursework), and non-standardized assessment methods and data collection (Stowe, 2013, pp. 247-248). The library implemented a post-assessment quiz for students to track their growth through the arc of ILI coursework, including an English composition course and a lower-level seminar on undergraduate research in their general education core. Stowe (2013) pointed out that the major pitfalls of the assessment were the way students were assigned identification numbers and the log-in system, but that the data derived from the assessment benefited their instructional methods exceeded expectations (pp. 267-269). He termed assessment tools as the “lingua franca of investment capital in this brave new world of increased accountability and expected return on investment,” as demonstrating the value of an academic library will help ensure its continued evolution and funding (Stowe, 2013, p. 274).

Among the other eight articles, many detailed their own experiences in developing new assessment methods for their own information literacy core competencies. Benjamin Hockenberry and Micquel Little of Saint John Fisher College (2013) detailed the dedicated weekly team meetings their library staff undertook while developing their own assessment strategy in “How We Came to Dread Fridays: Developing an Academic Library Assessment Plan Two Hours at a Time” (pp. 277-297). The staff plowed through literature, including the ACRL core standards, and over an intense summer developed an electronic assessment model delivered through the first-year English composition courses in conjunction with a three-year plan to fully enumerate the library’s impact on information literacy.

The importance of the first-year curriculum came up again in Stefanie Bluemle, Amanda Makula, and Margaret Rogal’s article “Learning by Doing: Performance Assessment of Information Literacy across the First-Year Curriculum”. Bluemle, Makula, and Rogal (2013), all librarians at Augustana College, switched out a quantitative, multiple choice assessment model with a performance assessment model, asking students to demonstrate their skill set beyond simple searching or rote memorization (pp. 298-313). Instead of mere percentages of questions answered correctly, the librarians now gained a wealth of information on how students applied the information given or did not fully understand the teaching methodologies. This new dataset, in turn, “can drive needed changes in the way librarians teach information literacy” rather than allow classes to stagnate and undermine the library’s mission and often their funding resources (Bluemle, Makula, and Rogal, 2013, p. 312).

The partnership between faculty and librarians is the central focus of “Improving and Assessing Information Literacy Skills through Faculty-Librarian Collaboration” by Meggan Smith and Amy Dailey of Gettysburg College (pp. 314-326). Two librarians partnered with a public health professor to not only provide three intensive information literacy instruction classes for a upper-level public health course, but for curriculum development as well. They utilized both a Likert scale (ranking a series of questions from strongly agree to strongly disagree) and free answer responses, giving not

only a solid statistics set from the Likert, but highly personalized answers from the free answer section (Smith and Dailey, 2013, pp. 320-322). Combining these two assessment styles provided a much more descriptive data set than an exclusively free-answer or an exclusively multiple-choice or Likert data set.

Online modules and tutorials are undoubtedly on the rise as instructional methods, and our own survey data pointed towards both a faculty and student desire for these as alternatives to in-classroom instruction. Millennials' learning styles, as a whole, skew heavily towards online and digital versus print and in-person. "Assessing the Effectiveness of Online Information Literacy Tutorials for Millennial Undergraduates" by Dianna Sachs, Kathleen Langan, Carrie Leatherman, and Jennifer Walters (2013) of Western Michigan University addressed the efficacy of these tutorials compared to their traditional counterparts (pp. 327-351). Even though the post-module assessment pointed to little-to-no change in student learning versus an in-person instruction session, the student satisfaction with the online module was markedly higher (Sachs et al., 2013, p. 334).

Typically, libraries keep their post-instruction assessment findings to themselves. Kevin Seeber (2013) of Colorado State University - Pueblo advocated for sharing data between instructors and librarians in his article "Using Assessment Results to Reinforce Campus Partnerships" (pp. 352-365). He asserted that "the process of sharing assessment results serves as an advertisement for the library and an affirmation of its mission. While such tactics are not likely to convince every faculty member to visit the library, they stand to increase awareness of the library's current abilities and goals for the future when it comes to teaching and learning" (Seeber, 2013, pp. 362-363). In times of fiscal uncertainty, increasing the library's presence and need is a sure-fire way to ensure continued funding, but the lack of anonymity to the data could potentially impact a student's willingness to be frank and honest.

The final three articles in *Proving Value and Improving Practice: Assessment Strategies for the Small Academic Library* embraced the shift into a physical and digital space in the library. In "Proving Value and Improving Practice: Using System Data to Analyze User Behaviors", Terry Huttenlock and David Malone (2013) of Wheaton College utilized data from their library's ILS, WorldCat Local, to analyze the different types of electronic resources users accessed, including how they accessed them (pp. 366-385). Ed Cherry, Stephanie Havron Rollins, and Toner Evans (2013) of Samford University correlated the number of student log-ins to grade point average in "Proving Our Worth: The Impact of Electronic Resource Usage on Academic Achievement" (pp. 386-398).

The final article, "Assessment from a Distance: A Case Study Implementing Focus Groups at an Online Library" by Jennifer Hill and Christine Patterson of Johns Hopkins University's Entrepreneurial Library program (2013), outlined assessment methods used at Excelsior College, an exclusively online school and library (pp. 399-413). Rather than a written/fill in method, they relied on focus groups composed of students using conference calls (Hill and Patterson, 2013, pp. 403-405). This further proves that the key to a quality dataset is a assessment module that is both accessible and gives participants the impression that their opinions do matter and will make an impact on the issues at hand.

Plan of Action and Data Collection

As mentioned prior, the major shift between the Integrative Liberal Studies general education track and the Liberal Arts Core are the writing and information literacy components. Under ILS, UNC Asheville students were required to take three (3) writing intensive (WI) designated courses and two (2) information literacy intensive (IL) courses. One of the courses for each section were met with the completion of LANG 120, Foundations of Academic Writing. Some majors also had cross-listed WI/IL courses, such as the History Department's HIST 250 (The Historian's Craft), but some academic departments allowed students to fulfill these requirements through elective coursework.

Under the LAC, there are no separate Writing Intensive and Information Literacy Intensive course requirements; both are now embedded directly in departmental and program courses and competencies. LANG 120 is still a requirement for graduation, so information literacy modules are still needed for that course. To formulate new instructional methods to reflect the shift from ILS to LAC, it is imperative to work with each academic department when they finish identifying the coursework that will fulfill the writing and information literacy intensive portions of the general education requirements.

Once these courses are identified, as well as instructors are determined for each LANG 120 section, instructors will be send an online form that asks that they indicate which particular modules they need for their classes, delivery method, and if they would like to directly partner with a librarian for a block of one-on-one instruction appointments for their students concurrent with class time. These modules will vary (and hopefully include online tutorials produced in conjunction with the New Media and Mass Communication departments as well as interactive tablet-based assignments) and cover issues such as:

- Go To The Source (Evaluating Resources)
- Mapreading 101 (Introduction to Library Resources)
- Dive Deeper (Major-Specific Database Usage)
- Where's You Get That? (Citation Styles and Generators)
- Where'd You Find That? (Exploring Primary Source Resources)
- and many, many more.

After instructors fill out this form, the library staff member tasked with instructional design and methods produces a course-specific LibGuide (a Springshare CMS product) for the course and pre-loads the module information in, in conjunction with the Web Services team. They will visit the class, either in the native classroom or in Kimmel Lab, and provide a brief tutorial on how to utilize the LibGuide resources.

At the end of the semester and/or after each module, students and faculty will be asked to fill out a brief survey containing both Likert information and free-answer questions on their experience, and students will be asked to take a quick (less than 10 minute) assessment based on the information delivered. The student assessment will include both multiple-choice/true-false and short answer questions based on the information given in the module. For example, if a student completes the

“Go to the Source” module, they might be asked to perform a search in Academic Search complete, list their search terms, and find an article they could use for their assignment. The student/faculty survey data would remain with the library to help evolve the module delivery and content, but the student post-assessment could be provided to the faculty to help corroborate knowledge retention, much like how Kevin Seeber outlined in “Using Assessment Results to Reinforce Campus Partnerships”. These assessment modules will be developed in conjunction with the Institutional Effectiveness division of the university to ensure that they adhere to policy.

The ideal timeline for this system is to implement it fully by the Fall 2014 semester, as this is when UNC Asheville will require all its students to graduate under the LAC rather than ILS. Majors that already have the WI/IL requirement covered in departmental requirements and the LANG 120 classes can opt into the program in the Spring and Summer 2014 sessions.

In building the modules and determining their effectiveness, data from the case studies published in *College & Undergraduate Libraries* will be extremely useful, combined with the data provided by the Fall 2012 Library Survey and the Fall 2013 Library Visioning Survey. Data desired includes:

- Satisfaction with the module
 - Student satisfaction
 - Faculty satisfaction
- Ease of information accessibility
- Quantitative data on knowledge retention

Conclusion

The shift from the ILS core to the LAC is a daunting shift for certain, especially when put into context with a temporary loss in staffing for instruction within the library. I feel confident, however, that by streamlining the instructional process and having it better reflect the needs and desires of our students and faculty, we will turn out a much more high-quality, more accessible model of instruction that will further cement D. Hiden Ramsey Library’s position as the vital center of scholarship on UNC Asheville’s campus.

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