

## Lesson 4 Discussion

For your initial post this week (to be posted by Saturday night) please respond to any of the following questions:

1. Kuhlthau's Information Search Process model requires intensive interactions with patrons, which might or might not be feasible in some library environments. You might think of this as an ideal and then adapt the model to the real situation you find yourself in. How might we transfer the principles of this model to a large university setting? What about a public library setting? How might we make this model doable in the real world of our libraries?
2. Can you speculate why Eisenberg's Big 6 model is so popular? Is it more profound than I think it is or is it just marketed well? How does the Big 6 model of information seeking inform your thinking about reference work in a public library setting?
3. Weiler and Fister both describe students who approach research in ways that are not entirely compatible with the way that libraries are organized and administered. How might their findings help you to provide reference service that is responsive to your users' needs, regardless of the type of library?
4. Respond to any other idea that struck you in the lecture notes or readings for this week.

After reading the Kuhlthau and Fister articles, the idea of librarians helping to combat learner anxiety and fear in the research process was particularly interesting to me. In an earlier post, I mentioned that I was a writing tutor in college. There is a definite culture associated with writing centers, as places where struggling students can get advice on not only how to approach writing using specific assignments as a mechanism to teach strategies but as a place where tutors can act as ambassadors to academic life. Many of the students I worked with were often first generation college students (just like me). They were anxious about their assignments and how to deal with an entirely new environment that asked them to do things for which they had no point of reference. Fister (2002) writes,

David Bartholomae, head of the English department at the University of Pittsburgh, has said that *students have to "invent the university"* when we ask them to write competently in different discourses, each with their own rules of evidence, argument, and expression, none of them familiar. I would argue that *students sent into the library to work on a paper or presentation must invent themselves as scholars -- but we often neglect to explain what that really means, other than giving them a byzantine set of rules on how to cite sources and dire warnings about plagiarism. It's not surprising that they think research is a process of finding answers, transcribing them, and documenting where they came from.* Research papers become a synthesis of quotes with a moral tacked on at the end. (italics added)

As I have a great interest in both libraries and writing centers, last semester I came across the topic of libraries and writing centers in universities working together to provide help to students engaged in writing assignments. Some academic libraries have helped ease the stress students face when doing research by resembling writing centers and vice versa. (James Elmborg, the author of the "contact zone" article we read in class a few weeks ago, actually has edited a book on the topic of library and writing center collaboration, titled *Centers for Learning: Writing Centers and Libraries in Collaboration* (2005)).

Students seem much more comfortable in writing centers, where tutors are normally peers, than the scary library. Librarians just aren't portrayed as being friendly and helpful like writing tutors, even though both librarians and tutors are working on the same "team"—for the students. Perhaps by creating space for writing centers in libraries, and space for libraries in writing centers, more students would feel more comfortable stepping into the library or using the library in the way many students are accustomed to dropping by the writing center. Thinking that both writing centers and libraries are one in the same or extensions of each other seems "easier" to mentally handle than treating the two as separate animals. What a relief it would be for students to know they could go to either place and receive the "right" type of help as they navigate research and writing.

Susan Gibbons, the Vice Provost and Dean of the University of Rochester's River Campus Libraries, gave a presentation last summer at the Library of Congress in which she reported the findings of library user studies conducted at her institution since 2003. The studies were based on anthropological and ethnographic methods. Part of what the libraries wanted to learn was what activities happen between the assignment of a research paper and its completion. The library learned that students sometimes cannot recognize the difference between writing and research problems because the process in writing a research paper is not linear. Sometimes students come to the reference desk thinking that the problem they are having is with research when in reality it is a writing problem. Writing centers also run into the students who think they are terrible writers when it is actually information they are lacking to make their paper "flow." Students sometimes just don't know how to articulate their problem, which is very frustrating for students and can sometimes be a challenge for librarians. In the University of Rochester's case, the library realized that the writing and research process needed to be treated as one activity. Librarians were trained to be writing tutors, and some tutors were trained in reference, so that students could be better helped when they approached the reference desk.

This idea has also been replicated in other university writing centers and libraries. Leslie J. Foutch, a librarian at Vanderbilt University, wrote an article (2010) describing her experience in aiding students taking a Human and Organizational Development (HOD) research and writing course directly in the Writing Studio. After discussions with the staff at the Writing Studio, she became aware that the students in the course were going to both the Writing Studio and library for help with their papers. The library and Writing Studio decided to work more closely together in the spring of 2009 by offering subject-specific workshops, which focused on how to use library resources, American Psychological Association (APA) citation style, and *how to incorporate research into writing* (italics added). The success of the workshops encouraged the Writing Studio and library to continue collaborating. In the Fall 2009 semester, *Foutch worked six hours a week within the Writing Studio, so that students could be helped with both writing and research in one place. Her office hours also served as drop-in hours* (italics added).

There are many, many other examples of this kind of meshing that I have found. This kind of idea seems like a viable way to provide more intensive help to students in the library than the quick question and answer sessions that have more or less defined reference help.

Elmborg, J.K., & Hook, S. (Eds.). (2005). *Centers for learning: writing centers and libraries in collaboration*. Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries.

Fister, B. (2002). Fear of reference. *The Chronicle Review*. Retrieved from

Foutch, L.J. (2010). Joining forces to enlighten the research process. *College & Research Libraries*, 71(7), 370-373.

Gibbons, S. (2010, June 21). Catching glimpses of the future of libraries through library user Studies. Webcast retrieved from [http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature\\_wdesc.php?rec=4937](http://www.loc.gov/today/cyberlc/feature_wdesc.php?rec=4937)