

### Lesson 8 Discussion

1. Evaluation and assessment are important in any field, especially a service-oriented field like ours. Chances are, if we are not providing the programs and services that patrons want, they won't tell us--they just won't come back. Thus, we need to conduct evaluations of our programs and services continuously. Our professional associations (ALA, ACRL, YALSA, etc.) provide criteria in documents such as the RUSA guidelines (for reference) or the ACRL standards (for instruction), and we can also develop our own criteria. What ideas do you have for conducting meaningful, doable, and sustainable evaluation/assessment of information literacy programs? (Note: If you respond to this question, be sure to hold onto it for Comp N in your e-Portfolio.)
2. What is your perspective about the future of information literacy? If you came back to library school in five, ten, or twenty years, do you think that an information literacy class would be offered? If so, how would it likely be similar to or different from this class?
3. Respond to some idea from the readings or lecture notes from this week.

This week's focus on the evaluation and assessment of information literacy programs and courses serves as a complement to my experience taking LIBR 285 Research Methods, in which the focus was on the evaluation of programs. One kind of assessment that was not discussed in that class was the use of portfolios as assessment tools. It is interesting that this tool was not discussed as it is the final requirement in which students at the School of Library and Information Science (SLIS) at San Jose must meet to graduate with a Masters degree in Library and Information Science.

The lesson notes for this week provide a reference to portfolio assessment from Carleton College in Minnesota in terms of its writing across the curriculum program. This concept is one in which I am familiar because of my experience as a writing tutor as an undergraduate at California State University Stanislaus. At Stanislaus, there is a program in place for students who have to take remedial English classes before completing the First Year Composition class requirement for general education. Students are placed into an English class based on their score on a test called the English Placement Test (EPT). There are four remedial classes that students can be placed in if they do not receive a passing score on the EPT: ENGL 0100 ILE (Intensive Language Experience) English I, ENGL 0101 ILE English II, ENGL 110 Composition Workshop, and ENGL 111 Writer's Workshop. "At the completion of any prebaccalaureate course, subsequent placement of each student is based on assessment of a portfolio of the student's writing" (CSU Stanislaus, 2011a).

I was not able to find the portfolio requirements, but I do plan to contact the Writing Center director at CSU Stanislaus to find out what the requirements are and where to find them (this information, however, is provided to students taking the class from what I recall).

As a way to "catch" college students from graduating without proper writing skills, however, the University requires that students pass an exam—with a rather bad reputation I might add—called the Writing Proficiency Screening Test (WPST), and upon satisfactory completion, take a writing proficiency (WP) course in their major. The program is described as follows:

Successfully passing the WPST and an approved WP course for your major with a grade of C- or higher, indicates that your department endorses your writing competency and that you have satisfied the University's Graduation Writing Assessment Requirement.

Since the WPST assesses basic writing skills, the writing topic is always one that does not require specialized information. A passing essay develops and sustains the writer's position throughout the essay.

You have 90 minutes to write one essay to demonstrate whether you write well enough to enroll in a WP course. A very modest performance will get you through because the WPST is a screening test rather than a final competence indicator. (CSU Stanislaus, 2011b)

I worked as a student assistant during reading/grading days of the exam, and there a number of instructors from various disciplines who participate in the grading, which is done by a rubric from zero to five (it used to be six). Exams are scored by two instructors (the grade given by the first instructor is unknown by the second instructor to limit bias). Passing essays need to have a combined score of seven or higher (CSU Stanislaus, 2011c).

For students who have taken the test twice to no avail, students can enroll in ENGL 3000,

...an Intermediate Composition Course designed to help you further develop your abilities in addressing the complexity of a topic, developing an argument, organizing information, and controlling language. When successfully completing the course and the final examination, you will be eligible to register for a Writing Proficiency course. (CSU Stanislaus, 2011d)

It seems like this program is rather cumbersome, especially when compared to Carleton College's writing proficiency program and the remedial English program already in place at CSU Stanislaus. It makes much better sense to have a portfolio system into make sure students really learn how to write.

In the context of information literacy, Dr. Simmons (2011) notes, "It seems reasonable that librarians could piggy back on these efforts to assess information literacy at the same time." After reading more about portfolio programs, I think this could work well at universities, but systematic change would require the full-fledged support of deans and faculty members. It would take a lot of work to revamp courses to emphasize information literacy alongside discipline specific topic, but a program like this would reach students much more effectively than any one-time session on research strategies or library tools. I believe that instructors would also see an improvement in the quality of research papers they assign.

In my research methods course, LIBR 285, I created a bibliography on the subject of joint efforts between libraries and writing centers and programs and was very excited when I discovered that many universities and even high schools are actively collaborating to foster better researchers and writers at the same time, often using portfolios as an evaluative method. Although I have not done further research on this topic since December 2010, there are several articles of note I would like to share. Below are annotations of the relevant articles.

**Deitering, A., & Jameson, S. (2008). Step by step through the scholarly conversation: A collaborative library/writing faculty project to embed information literacy and promote critical thinking in first year composition at Oregon State University. *College & Undergraduate Libraries*, 15(1-2), 57-79.**

Anne-Marie Deitering is the Undergraduate Services Librarian at Oregon State University (OSU) in Corvallis, Oregon, and Sara Jameson is the Composition Coordinator also at OSU. This article describes the partnership between writing instructors and librarians to develop an “information literacy curriculum for OSU’s First Year Composition (FYC) course” (p. 58). The course has a four-week unit that “focuses on the connections between critical thinking, writing and learning, and information literacy” (p. 57). The assignments, including an information literacy portfolio to be done on their topic before attending a library workshop and several writing portfolios, during the component “model a recursive critical research and writing process” (p. 57). This article is especially useful as it describes constructivist-minded activities, like the conversation model developed by Davidson and Crateau (2000) and the “they say, I say” model developed by Graff and Birkenstein (2006), which make research and scholarly writing come “alive” for students. One flaw of this study, which the authors acknowledge, is that work is still needed to be completed regarding assessment. It is difficult to say whether or not this program has been useful, but the activities and theoretical undertones make for a compelling curriculum.

**Huerta, D., & McMillan, V.E. (2000). Collaborative instruction by writing and library faculty: A two-tiered approach to the teaching of scientific writing. *Issues in Science and Technology Librarianship*, 28. Retrieved from <http://www.istl.org/00-fall/article1.html>**

Deborah Huerta is the Science Librarian and Victoria E. McMillan is the Research Associate in Biology and chair of the Interdisciplinary Writing Department at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York. In this article, the authors “describe the results of six years of experimentation with the collaborative teaching of scientific writing to college undergraduates at both beginning and advanced levels” (Abstract). The beginning course is aimed at teaching students basic college writing and information retrieval skills while also helping students to write lab reports and reviews. The advanced course is designed to show students more advanced research methods and “the style and format of professional journal articles” (Abstract). Each course includes peer review of work, one-on-one conferencing, and a writing portfolio. The authors include descriptions of the assignments used in both courses; these assignments focus on writing for different types of audiences and formats and using a variety of resources. The course is revised every year based on student suggestions and changes in technology. Although this article is not necessarily an example of writing center/library collaboration, it shows how information across the curriculum programs can merge well with writing across the curriculum programs. It also shows that writing and research is beyond “just English” coursework (Conclusion section, para. 1).

**Peary, A., & Ernack, L. (2004). Reading, writing, research: Incorporating strategies from composition and rhetoric into library instruction. *College and Undergraduate Libraries*, 11(1), 33-43.**

Alexandria Peary is the writing program director at Daniel Webster College in Nashua, New Hampshire, and Linda Ernack is the technical systems librarian also at Daniel Webster College. This article describes their experience in co-teaching a required freshmen writing course which focused writing as much as it did on research. This course, En 102: College Writing and Research, is the second part of a required two-course English component. The course is topic-specific with a research focus. The students keep portfolios which are graded based on competency in using in-text citation, works cited pages, and ability to write short (5-7 page) and longer (10-15 page) research papers. "Both the librarian and the faculty member were equally responsible for teaching and grading through the process techniques of composition and rhetoric, including one-on-one conferences, process notes, and the staging of the overall research work..." (p. 34). The article shows that the process-orientation versus final result approach of rhetoric studies can be incorporated well into library research; focusing on the process encourages good research habits and allows students to connect with their topic more fully than in "unstructured research activity" (p. 42).

**Scharf, D., et al. (2007). Direct assessment of information literacy using writing portfolios. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 33(4), p. 462-477.**

According to Davida Scharf, Norbert Elliot, Heather A. Huey, Vladimir Briller, and Kamal Joshi, information literacy assessment is usually conducted with surveys and multiple choice tests. These forms of assessment, however, do not allow for the "evaluat[ion of] higher-order skills, such as a student's ability to integrate new information." At the New Jersey Institute of Technology (NJIT), the authors developed a plan to test student learning of information literacy skills with a method already in use, the writing portfolio, which is a "[vehicle] that capture[s] student work on a longitudinal basis, allow[ing] insight into process and product" (p. 463). This model was based on an understanding that "[b]oth writing and information literacy are iterative processes that require evaluation of information, critical thinking and reasoning, revision and integration" (p. 462-3). The assessment focuses on five traits—citation, evidence of independent research, appropriateness, integration, and overall information literacy portfolio score—tied to the Association of College and Research Library (ACRL) standards for information literacy which were approved in 2000. The results from 2005 revealed that information literacy scores "fell below 7 on [the] scale of 2-12, although each of the writing traits met or exceeded the cut score" (p. 468). A task force suggested integrating information literacy across the curriculum. Courses have also been added that "stress the relationship between writing and information literacy" (p. 471). This detailed study is interesting as it offers a way to see how students are incorporating information literacy skills throughout the drafting process. Changes to instruction can be made in light of these observations.

#### References

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Lindsay Davis  
M.H. Simmons  
LIBR 287  
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