

Library Literacy in the Community College Setting

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Abstract

This article explores the role of the instruction librarian as an equal player in higher learning initiatives, and focuses on student motivation, information literacy, activity and assessment, and collaboration. Library literacy is a major component of student success in community colleges, but the role of the instruction librarian is often undervalued. Current research points to the need for strengthening college research and writing and it is now being recognised that library literacy programmes are needed more than ever to facilitate this process. This paper also looks into information literacy sessions at Bermuda College that mirror this shift in education and are beneficial to strategic planning and the accreditation of community colleges in the US and Canada.

KEY WORDS: *library literacy, information literacy, student-centered learning, teacher and librarian collaboration*

Introduction

In recent years, paradigms in education have shifted, promoting information retrieval at a rapid rate. Information literacy programming must meet these challenges. According to Reitz (1996), information literacy (IL) can be defined as

Skill in finding the information one needs, including an understanding of how libraries are organised, familiarity with the resources they provide (including information formats and automated search tools), and knowledge of commonly used research techniques. The concept also includes the skills required to critically evaluate the information content and employ it effectively.

IL programming serves the twofold purpose of helping students to become information literate and efficient in the research process. Programmes must be assessed on an ongoing basis to ensure they engage first-year college students, and stakeholders in institutes of higher learning have prioritised the implementation of IL programming in all facets of the college curriculum. Studies show that community colleges now account for 45 per cent of US graduates and there is a great responsibility on these institutions to provide IL in the early stages of community college education (ACRL 2014). There has been a shift whereby more high school graduates in the US enroll in community colleges prior to Baccalaureate programmes. However, many students will be detained in remedial courses during their community college experience, and almost half of the first-year community college students will drop out. Transitioning from an authoritative educational environment to an autonomous one places more responsibilities on students and can be problematic, and student engagement is necessary to meet the challenges of student retention (Gibson 2006).

Some creative approaches to meeting this challenge have involved closing the gaps between curricular and co-curricular skills. What this means is that core courses and library literacy can be amalgamated as shared skills. At California's Fullerton College, a research component was paired with an ethnic studies course and is receiving

positive feedback for its successful information retention rates (Warren 2006). Another college, Earlham, has paired first-year Humanities core courses with library literacy, embedding the core topics into the IL lesson and creating library research relevant to the course (Budd 2012). Many colleges and universities have now included their IL component as a credit course, and have extended library instruction from one hour to five to eight classes over a semester. Studies indicate the need for new and innovative avenues for accountability in student success, and libraries must be seen as equal players in order to foster a cohesive learning experience and student success at community colleges (Green 2014).

Bermuda College background

Bermuda College is the only tertiary level institution of higher learning in Bermuda. It has an average enrollment of 1,300 students per year and a total of 35 information literacy classes per year, mostly requested by the Humanities courses. One-shot instruction sessions can last between 60 and 90 minutes and are often modified according to the college curriculum. The main goal of such library instruction is to enable students to find, evaluate, and use information resources effectively. These skills are tied-in with course information to make for a broader and more meaningful information experience. Library instruction for first-year students encompasses a library tour, an introduction to the library homepage, and searches on how to retrieve books and database articles. Topics range from information ethics to copyright and privacy issues. Projectors, online interactive tools, and library databases tailored to specific research are used to keep students engaged, and initiatives such as the text-the-librarian service offer a quick response to requests for appointments and reference questions. Instruction on the best apps for higher learning and using social networking tools facilitate learning by adding new dimensions to information literacy at the Bermuda College Library, and go beyond the traditional “sage on the stage” classroom experience. Instruction sessions provide the instruction librarian with opportunities to connect with students. Students are also encouraged to enhance their library literacy skills through subsequent library sessions in upper level courses, and Bermuda College Library is promoted for its lifelong benefits beyond the classroom.

A variety of challenges arise in the design and application of information literacy sessions, particularly by presenting materials incongruent with needs of the class, so the focus should be on adequate preparation in advance of the IL session. A key to lesson planning is the use of materials appropriate to the course level and course curriculum, and according to lecturer specifications for the lesson. Understanding the needs and expectations of both students and lecturers, and the core principles of the coursework, are critical to the effectiveness of IL programming at Bermuda College.

It is never assumed that high school students entering Bermuda College have adequate research skills and they must be transitioned into the college programme with this in mind. Senior high schools like Berkeley Institute, Bermuda High School, Cedarbridge Academy, and Bermuda Institute have taken advantage of the opportunity to prepare their students early for college through Bermuda College’s IL tours and instruction sessions. The Bermuda College dual enrolment programme assimilates high school students from Cedarbridge Academy and Berkeley Institute into the post-secondary level English and Mathematics courses as well as other courses at college level, thus giving students advanced placement to add five credits towards a college degree, while still attending their respective high schools. (*College Impressed with Record Number of Dual Enrolment Students* 2014). The factors that promote student success are teacher and librarian collaboration, lesson planning, using appropriate presentation methods for information sessions, and assessment of input and output measures. Setting students tasks using the materials presented allows them to truly test their skills. Students are asked to navigate the databases at the end of an instruction session by conducting brief topic searches. This allows the instruction librarian to see how students manoeuvre through the databases and to redirect students in their searches. Emmons and Martin (2002) state that “students come to campus highly computer literate, not realizing they were information illiterate” and it is the goal of IL sessions to make these distinctions clear and assess how to bridge the gaps.

Motivation

In Green's (2014) account of her experience in motivating first-year college students at Plymouth State University, she points to "pathways" or "desire lines," which are logical entry points for student searches. She found that most students use Google as a starting point for a topic search and, rather than be dismissive of this, Green used Google Scholar to instruct them on navigating the university's online catalogue. Green was thus able to align Google Scholar's similarities with Plymouth's online catalogue. The use of pathways in this student-centered approach to learning is important in enabling students to navigate searches and to return to and revise those searches at a later date. Whatever path is used to instruct students, the outcome should be demonstrated in their ability to locate, evaluate, and effectively use the information needed (ACRL 2014).

Finch and Jefferson (2013) believe intrinsic motivation can benefit students' receptiveness to the material in literacy sessions. Intrinsic rewards involve incorporating the value of the materials presented in a way that is meaningful to students, making this knowledge its own reward. Extrinsic rewards are tactile and less meaningful, like giving praise or high grades. Understanding the factors that drive students' database searches and what might inhibit searches is part of lesson planning. Often students are unsure where to start their research and are stumped by the research process. Budd (2012) notes that when both problem and desired outcome are not obvious, there is likely to be difficulty in arriving at a strategy for solving the problem. Kuhlthau's theories on motivation in information science research explore the "feelings and attitudes of students as they proceed through the research process" (Small et al. 2004). Students might display levels of "uncertainty" and "incongruity" in their searches that either inspire curiosity or cause them to have research paralysis. Librarians must recognise a student's difficulty in knowing where to start research and find unique and creative ways to build on this experience: doing this in a short span of time can be challenging for librarians. Factors that contribute to the engagement of students include opportunities for student participation and interaction; relevant content; the use of humour; instructor enthusiasm; and a variety of teaching methods (2004).

Learning theories that are adapted to library instruction can help to engage students and motivate them to approach information from varying perspectives. Current learning theories used in IL are student-centered, allowing the instruction librarian to follow students' examples in learning. Active learning, also known as experiential learning, keeps students engaged in the instruction process by using participation and reflection activities that promote critical thinking. Active learning is at the forefront of IL theory, using "real world" activities such as CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) training that involves resuscitating a mannequin connected to a computer. It uses motivation to keep students interested during instruction sessions, and this can also improve students' understanding and retention of information (Wyess 2005).

Blended learning allows students to get the best of both worlds by experiencing face-to-face classroom interaction with online learning environments, supported by educational platforms such as Moodle and online tools like Pinterest. Blended learning can be synchronous or asynchronous, providing the "live" time in peer discussion, or allowing for completion of a quiz in the student's own time (Rodrigo and Nguyen 2013). Lecturers at Bermuda College have the capability of using Moodle, on which they can post additional readings, provide e-mail or chat communications, or open a drop-box for assignments.

Project-based learning makes students accountable to themselves and a team through group work. Bell (2010) explains that students drive their own learning through inquiry, as well as work collaboratively to research and create projects that reflect that knowledge. Such learning has been applied to certain English classes at Bermuda College. Students are able to formulate their own questions about the materials and reach new conclusions from these inquiries. The Bermudian Literature course and the second-level English courses at the Bermuda College have successfully heralded a paired research component using the primary resources found in the Brian Burland Centre for Research. In a project-based learning environment, students are given collections to report on, with a list of questions that assist in the analysis of the materials. Local author Brian Burland's collection of photographs,

journals, letters, sketches, scrapbooks, novels, manuscripts, notes, and outlines are housed in archival boxes. Students answer a range of questions about the boxed materials they choose to investigate. One group might be interested in Burland's correspondence and another in his journals. Students explore and report on the life of the author, his spirituality according to his works, and aspects of his fiction that provide factual details of his own life. Based on observation, students are curious about the materials, and this curiosity ignites discussion that inspires research topics. The Bermudian Literature course demonstrates the critical thinking and investigative learning that allows the library's special collections to be used as a tool for bridging the ACRL IL standards and core research skills in English. Giving students the ability to control what is being learned and how they learn is the foundation of student-centered learning, which is quickly becoming a hallmark of college retention and success.

Activities and assessment

There are many tools that can help students develop their research and writing skills. Guidelines that have been excellent in breaking down the goals and skill sets for assessment are the *American Association of School Librarians: Standards for the 21st Century Learner* (2007) and the *Association of College and Research Libraries: Standards for Libraries in Higher Education* (2014), which are widely used in technology for education. The AASL standards are for K-12 and involve the use of skills, resources, and tools to think critically, create new knowledge from old, share acquired knowledge, and to pursue personal and aesthetic growth. Further subsets of these goals help to break down these components into smaller, attainable tasks for students. Similarly, the ACRL standards set the college and university level benchmarks, and place academic libraries as joint partners in community college success by guiding IL programming. The ACRL standards (2014) follow emerging trends and demonstrate the importance of pedagogical practices, including research-based learning and inquiry-based learning, to increased student success and graduation rates. Student engagement features prominently in the ACRL standards and demonstrates how students grow by being immersed in library resources and library literacy programming.

An effective approach to IL assessment is by creating summative and formative assessments in tandem and correlating the information gleaned from the sessions with the needs for future literacy learning. In order to gather information on Bermuda College students' self-assessment of their IL skills and assessment of the IL session, the author provides a hard-copy at the end of an IL session. The survey comprises four questions through which students self-assess their research capabilities before and after an information session. The subsequent four questions focus on the librarian's performance and the IL resources. One question provides students with a box to tick if they require further information. This is followed by a comment box at the very end.

Between September and November 2014, 59 surveys were completed. Students rated themselves on a scale of 1-4, from "I'm lost" to "very confident": 85 per cent indicated they were comfortable using the library for research purposes. On the librarian performance questions, the lowest score was for the final question, "The librarian who led this class encouraged the students to participate," with 76 per cent agreeing. This score in itself demonstrates students' desire for more active learning in IL sessions beyond the "sage on the stage." Comment boxes provide further information on student satisfaction (Liles 2014).

A discipline-focused summative quiz helps to emphasise students' understanding of subject-specific library resources. The outcome of all the assessments is regular improvement on the current IL lesson by incorporating new technology and resources where possible.

Collaboration

It is advantageous to students and for the success of library literacy programmes when teachers are part of the instruction sessions. With new database subscriptions and the application of new technologies (like e-book subscriptions in many community college libraries), teachers should be aware of the current resources available for

their coursework. Collaboration between educators and libraries, which unifies the ideas, theories, and outcomes the coursework means to accomplish, is sorely undervalued. Key terms and topics must be shared between teachers and librarians so that the teaching materials used in the classroom extend to the instruction sessions, and vice versa.

Often teachers are unaware of the benefits of collaboration. Firstly, teachers need a clear understanding of the curriculum and, secondly, understanding of the library curriculum. The latter, when paired with the content curriculum, will address some of the disconnection between teachers and instruction librarians (Montiel-Overall and Jones 2011).

Many of the critical thinking skills required for first-level English courses are the same as for information literacy in libraries. First-year students have not incorporated the skills of finding and using credible sources or of effectively citing and applying sources to avoid plagiarism. The responsibility for inculcating these skills is handed to librarians by teachers (Price et al. 2011). This can be viewed as a starting point for incorporating instruction sessions into the first-year English courses that are taken by *all* students.

Peer sessions are also a part of college coursework and are viewed as a major component of community college success. Learning communities can be a positive support system and a means for generating ideas for curriculum development, whether they stem from student interaction or teacher collaboration, and are also important to ongoing dialogue in the institution. Warren (2006) states that learning communities are one way for colleges to offer more engaging educational opportunities.

Discussion

Many community colleges and universities are designing IL credit courses to be offered in five to eight sessions. They recognise that information literacy must be implemented beyond the one-shot 60 minute session in order for students to make significant strides. In a study to “determine how IL courses were being presented and taught in academic settings,” researchers noted that IL courses have changed significantly by moving from database and periodical searches to addressing the overwhelming glut of information that is available on the Internet. Researchers studying the changes in IL programming noted that the current issues are misuse and abuse of information, leading to plagiarism and copyright infringements. Elrod et al. (2013) see the Internet as a boon to students in their research. It may also mean they avoid citations altogether. The Internet can be an invitation to student cheating, which can be inadvertent and stem from not knowing how to use information correctly. Students also experience information overload and become overwhelmed in the writing process, leading to incorrect citations. These are areas of need that are becoming apparent in IL, not just in North American colleges and universities, but at Bermuda College as well.

During my brief time as Research and Instructional Librarian, I have come to realise that Information Science is evolving rapidly and that education is shifting from the study of terms and concepts to the placing of students in active learning environments. With the ongoing changes in the digital landscape, IL should be moving towards the use of digital and online resources with integrity and responsibility. Teaching students to safeguard their information by developing strong passwords for accounts, exercising responsibility when sending emails and posting to social networks is advantageous to preserving the image left by the digital footprint. Students must regard the Internet as a permanent record-keeper and avoid turning-off potential employers by sabotaging their personal integrity.

Recently, the ACRL Committee has been called upon to update its standards to address the challenges presented by online information available through unfiltered sources via the community, media, and organisations on the open web (Banks 2013). Because of this paradigm shift, I anticipate an increased classroom and online presence in the near future with a focus on Internet open sources. A core requirement for IL is a basic introduction to library skills, which should form part of the first-year student orientation at Bermuda College. An invitation should also be sent to private and public high school seniors for IL sessions in basic library and online research skills. Bermuda College

might also require a credit course of at least six weeks, which should include modules on, but not limited to:

1. The Library and its Functions
2. Catalogue and Database Searches
3. Academic Integrity: Cheating, Plagiarism, and Copyright
4. The Digital Footprint: Exercising Online Responsibility
5. Citation Formatting: MLA and APA
6. Websites, Online Tools, and Apps for Higher Learning

This will be an opportunity for students to apply the *ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (2014), which examines access to, evaluation, incorporation, use, and understanding of the information needed for the research. Courses should be assessed on an ongoing basis in order to improve content, presentation methods, and educational tools.

Bermuda College Library has provided a template for information literacy programming that is tailored to Bermuda's culturally unique demography and to fostering Bermuda's future leaders. This includes partnering IL with college courses in studying unique collections such as the Burland Collection. Students are thus able to draw their own conclusions from primary sources and write their own story by taking on the identity of the era and reporting on their understanding of those events. In this way, students can become an authority, as digital commons and works of scholarly communication are expected to rise on college and university campuses, making students the leaders of today, not tomorrow.

Librarians have a pivotal role in academic libraries, and have the ability to tie together elements of the curriculum. The success of the community colleges requires an earnest appreciation of the role of librarians and the deeper responsibility they have in ensuring that students adapt to new information sources in 21st century education. Colleges and universities are beginning to make information literacy a credit course. Gibson (2006) states that although librarians are key to student engagement, the literature and research has not highlighted this important role. It takes the entire college community to produce a liberally educated undergraduate. Getting students, educators, librarians, and other stakeholders to understand this concept and the importance of library literacy to student success will be a springboard to greater understanding of information literacy in the 21st century.

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