

Eric Shannon and Leslie Inglis

Teaching FYI

A learning experience

In the fall of 2016, faced with a record number of incoming first-year students, the Franklin Pierce University administration asked two members of the library faculty to teach sections of First Year Inquiry (FYI). As instruction librarians, we both had experience standing in front of a room and delivering interactive one-shot instruction sessions. We were now faced with the challenging task of designing and implementing a semester-long class, as well as becoming advisors to the roughly 20 students who had signed up to take it.

Franklin Pierce University is a small, rural liberal arts college in southwestern New Hampshire known locally for our Division II sporting program. Our student body is a mixture of first-generation college students and student athletes. Librarians have faculty rank and are members of the faculty union, but have different job responsibilities and job descriptions than teaching faculty. This was the first time that the university had turned to librarians to teach.

Background

FYI is a required class for freshman. It is designed to introduce students to college-level research, to help students acclimate to college life, and to provide them the opportunity to explore possible career opportunities. Professors in the FYI program pick different themes and readings for their

respective classes. Each section, regardless of theme, works on improving students' academic skills and addresses three learning outcomes—information literacy, inquiry and analysis, and career exploration. FYI classes have required common assignments, including a three-part academic and personal plan, designed to help students reflect upon their transition to college, academic challenges, and career exploration, as well as a multipart research project.

Prior to the teaching assignments, we had developed a one-shot library session for FYI, designed to orient students to the library website and basic research skills by having them come up with a list of keyword terms, and perform simple keyword searches in both the library catalog and the database Academic Search Complete. We found that students were able to do this in the library classroom setting, but when they were tasked with finding sources related to their inquiry questions as a homework assignment, many devolved to their high school habits of using Google and select-

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ing the first few websites that their search retrieved.

Those who did use the library resources used the discovery search box on the main page to search for articles, instead of using Academic Search Complete, as they were taught in class. Rather than coming up with a list of keyword terms, most students were typing whole questions into the library catalog. When they failed to find any information, many simply gave up. It was as if all the information we thought they had learned and had successfully executed in a formal library instruction setting had simply evaporated when trying to conduct research on their own. Even some of the better students in class lacked initiative when searching. They were not searching for discovery, but instead for immediate results and would subsequently become frustrated when their initial search did not retrieve adequate sources. We hoped to learn more about our students' approach to library research through the experience of working with FYI classes over the course of an entire semester.

Teaching FYI

The process of researching our selected themes (Extreme Sports and Digital Divide) and developing homework assignments (in addition to those required of all sections) was time consuming. We were given our class assignments over the summer, and both of us chose to use library resources as our primary readings instead of having the students purchase a textbook. Using articles from our databases gave us a chance to see how students interacted with library resources away from our experience at the reference desk. Tasks we thought were easy, and demonstrated quickly in our library instruction classes, proved to be challenging for students trying to perform them on their own. A homework assignment that perma-linked to an article in a database confused students who didn't realize they needed to click on the full-text link in order to retrieve the article. Students preferred that we posted articles as PDFs whenever possible so they didn't need to navigate to find them.

DVDs placed on course reserve presented a challenge to time-strapped students.

Pedagogically, the real challenge started several weeks into the semester, as the excitement of entering college (and teaching our first course) began to fade and many students' study habits devolved to their high school levels. Classroom management challenges such as late assignments, "goofing off" in class, not following directions, and absences, were among the challenges that we rarely if ever had to deal with as instruction librarians teaching one-shot sessions with a professor present.

As the students' advisors, we became more fully immersed in the lives of the students in our classes and gained a greater awareness of their priorities. Most first-year advising is done through the FYI framework, with students being assigned to their major advisor in the second semester. At Franklin Pierce, advisors are notified whenever students are "written-up" for a dormitory infraction (usually involving alcohol or drugs) or failing a class. The advisor is then asked to reach out to the student. This is all in addition to guiding them through the labyrinth of choosing majors and classes for the following semester.

Our classroom experience did indeed give us a greater understanding of the ways that first-year students conduct research on their own, outside of a formal library instruction setting. As instruction librarians, our primary professional goal is to teach students how to search for and evaluate information sources. Students, on the other hand, are juggling multiple classes, extracurricular activities, time-consuming intercollegiate sports, as well as dealing with personal relationships and homesickness. We learned that the library instruction one-shot was just another piece of information they had to manage. This is not to say that library instruction is unimportant, but that the information that they learn in their instruction session is often quickly buried among the numerous other assignments and extracurricular activities in which students participate.

About half of our students come to school without experience searching a database, and many claim to not have been in a library since they were young children. As a result of not being exposed to library resources, students experienced problems such as mistaking the abstract of the article for the article itself or not knowing to click on the PDF full-text link that was displayed on the article summary page of Academic Search Complete. Some students, who used the catalog to search, did not realize that they needed to click the access online button to view the actual article. Although there is an assumption that this generation of college students, having grown up with technology, is tech savvy, we found that many of the students were lacking basic computer skills, including website navigation, Microsoft Word formatting, and even sending and downloading email attachments. While competent at using social media on their smartphones, many students struggled with basic technological skills

What we learned

Our experience teaching FYI taught us that students need more practice searching for resources on their own outside of a formal instruction setting. As a result, we are re-designing our overall instruction program to move website orientation and basic catalog, database, and keyword search skills to a module in Canvas, our campus LMS. Instead of trying to teach students to use the catalog, the library databases, and develop keyword terms in a 50-minute one-shot setting, we have created three separate tutorials for these skills. These tutorials have been shared to Canvas commons so that FYI professors can import them into their classes and time the integration of skills-based library instruction with students' research projects.

The tutorials themselves require that students practice a library skill, such as performing a keyword search in Academic Search Complete, to answer the tutorial quiz questions. For example, to complete the library database tutorial, students will watch three

brief videos—one that explains why and when to use databases, another that explains and defines magazine and journal articles, and finally a video that demonstrates how to navigate to the library databases and perform a basic search using Academic Search Complete. Although watching the videos is a form of passive learning, the questions that students must answer to complete the tutorials require using the databases. For example, the first question in the library database tutorial is “Use the database Academic Search Complete to perform a keyword search for college success. How many articles do you retrieve?”

We plan to encourage FYI instructors to assign these tutorials for homework so that students get experience using the resources on their own. If students get stuck, we will encourage them to seek the help of a reference librarian, which will give them experience using the library and encourage them to take initiative. These online tutorials will not replace library instruction, but will introduce basic skills so that we do not have to teach them in class. Instead, we will use the formal library instruction session as a research workshop where students can search for sources while a librarian and their FYI professor is present to guide them through the process.

Additionally, since the students will have access to the videos, they can reinforce the basic skills by rewatching the videos, if necessary. For this upcoming year, we plan to try out this method of library instruction for several sections of FYI and see how students in these sections perform on their research projects.

Next steps

At the end of the fall semester, marking the conclusion of our second experience teaching FYI, several sections of FYI (including our two sections) trialed the online library instruction tutorials in Canvas. As part of our assessment of information literacy, we plan to compare the research projects

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Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. Hillary Davis, "CCC Closes Flagstaff Campus Library," *Arizona Daily Sun*, April 13, 2010, http://azdailysun.com/news/local/education/ccc-closes-flagstaff-campus-library/article_5e15a392-aeb9-5267-9ddd-afdb063ba1a7.html.

2. "CCC Library," Coconino Community College, last modified 2016, www.coconino.edu/library.

3. Estelle Pope, "The New Coconino Community College Library: A Librarian, Collaborative Library Services, and an Online

Library," in *How to Thrive as a Solo Librarian*, eds. Carol Smallwood and Melissa J. Clapp (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 163–71.

4. Pope, "The New Coconino Community College Library," 163.

5. Kristin Anthony, "Reconnecting the Disconnects: Library Outreach to Faculty as Addressed in the Literature," *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 17, no. 1 (2010): 91.

6. Margaret Bausman, Sarah Laleman Ward, and John Pell, "Beyond Satisfaction: Understanding and Promoting the Instructor-Librarian Relationship," *New Review of Academic Librarianship* 20 no. 2 (2014): 129.

7. Ibid.

8. Susan Avery, "Adjunct Faculty and the Library: A Challenge for Change," *College & Undergraduate Libraries* 20, no. 1 (2013): 36–37. ❧

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of students who received library instruction through the Canvas tutorials to those whose library instruction consisted of the traditional library one-shot session. We also incorporated an active learning information literacy session that focused on evaluating information sources.

One session, which we have informally titled "Using the Credibility Continuum," proved to be helpful in giving students a greater understanding of the types of sources that they are likely to encounter while doing research. For this lesson, we brought a box filled with an assortment of 20 items from the library collection to class. The goal was to encourage hands-on evaluations of sources, including credibility, audience, author credentials, academic journals versus online articles, websites, and DVD documentaries. In class, each student is given a source and is asked to evaluate it using the credibility continuum and the CRAAP test.¹ This led to very good classroom discussions on the types of information found in different sources, and the similarities in evaluating both hard-copy and electronic sources. We plan to market

this active learning activity to additional classes in hopes of increasing students' understanding of information literacy.

Conclusion

Overall we have enjoyed the experience of working with students in the classroom. We felt that one of the most beneficial aspects was the ability to see students using their skills "in the wild" and not when they are being guided by us at the reference desk or in library instruction. Our experience teaching FYI has provided us with a better understanding of first-year students' mindsets and research habits. We hope that this experience has also enabled us to devise a more effective library instruction program for first-year students. Our experiences have reinforced the importance of active learning in the classroom and the necessity of additional library review sessions beyond the one-shot.

Note

1. <http://libguides.franklinpierce.edu/credibility>, a LibGuide created by Franklin Pierce University Librarians. ❧