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“An Information Literacy Umbrella for Instruction”
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Abstract

Instructional activities at Joyner Library, East Carolina University, currently include course-integrated instruction, online tutorial use, class web pages, research consultations, a customizable subject guide database, and a writing contest. These instructional activities can be more usefully planned and evaluated with proper program building. With an improved planning process, an “Information Literacy umbrella” will also allow the instruction librarians to target certain student groups more effectively, specifically incoming first-year students, distance education students, and students who are participating in a new 3-year-to-degree program.

Introduction

East Carolina University is a public doctoral university that serves more than 20,000 students from its Greenville, North Carolina, campus. Joyner Library serves the University’s liberal arts, sciences and professional fields for on-campus and distance education students. Library instruction at Joyner comes through several venues. Teaching faculty members may request course integrated library instruction for their sessions; students can sign up for individualized research consultations; and the Reference Department web site hosts several instructional tools: an online tutorial called “Seven Step Guide to Library Research,” web pages for specific classes and a customizable subject guide database named Pirate Source. Another instructional outreach activity, one which fosters faculty collaboration, is the W. Keats Sparrow English 1200 Award, a First-Year English Composition Award developed and implemented by the librarians at Joyner Library. [1]

We are pleased with the variety of instructional activities we offer and would like to see them continue to improve. One means of improvement involves the programmatic structures that guide our planning and coordinate our attempts to evaluate our services. Improved planning and better use of evaluations result in more effective strategies for content delivery, improved training for instructional techniques, and increased ability to target new user groups for effective instruction. Envisioning an Information Literacy umbrella provides us with a conceptual image to describe these developing structures. This article will use the image of an Information Literacy umbrella to address current instructional practices at Joyner Library, and to describe both future initiatives and the potential means of improving these services by gathering them under an Information Literacy structure.

Current Instructional Activities

Most of our visible instruction activities take place in Joyner's electronic classrooms. These classes are the easiest activities to point to, in a sense. The majority of our teaching sessions are one-time course integrated instruction sessions. While librarians from other public services schedule and teach library instruction sessions, the greatest number of classes are taught by Reference librarians in response to requests from teaching faculty to the Coordinator of Instructional Services via email, telephone, or the library's electronic request form. The Coordinator discusses content of the sessions with the faculty member and ensures that library staff teaching the sessions understand the faculty member's objectives. Instruction librarians from the Reference Department take the Library Instruction Scheduling Form, which lists contact information for the faculty member bringing in the class, the number of students expected, where this class will be taught, and the content of the session. Librarians are encouraged to contact the faculty member to clarify the assignment and the role of the library instruction session in that assignment. After the class, the librarian records the Standards and Performance Indicators from the Association of College and Research Libraries' Information Literacy Competency Standards, notes the preparation and teaching time, and returns the form to the Coordinator of Instructional Services. [2] Librarians in other departments follow other procedures for scheduling, instructing, and requesting feedback regarding classes.

Evaluation of the instruction sessions offered by the Reference Department primarily comes from two instruments: an online evaluation form that librarians can offer to students at the end of the session, and an end-of-semester survey of the faculty who have brought in their classes. These evaluation measures provide some rough guidance, and we would like to maximize their benefit by encouraging all teaching librarians, from all departments, to use them, and then utilize their feedback to suggest lesson modification or additional instructional training. The change we are proposing would bring instruction sessions taught by other public service librarians under one Information Literacy umbrella, to share the same scheduling and feedback instruments. Since most of our instruction sessions are these "one-shot" classes, we need to work carefully with feedback in order to maximize the value of the students' time in the library.

The improvements available because of better evaluation may be most immediately practical for our largest "customer," the English Department. Library instruction reaches approximately 70% of the total number of sections of the first two levels of English Composition, English 1100 and English 1200. During the English 1100 library sessions, our goal is to help students become familiar with the library and to make them feel comfortable finding and using library materials. We try to teach more complicated information literacy objectives during sessions with the English 1200 classes.

Unless the instructor requests something different for the English 1100 class, we provide a quick overview of the library web page, show the students how to use the electronic journal locator to see if a periodical is available full text online through one of the library's databases, and explain how to search for books in the catalog. Then, we show students how to recognize a call number and how to locate a book in the library. If time allows, we ask the students to physically pull the item from the shelves. At specified times during the session, students assess their learning by

filling out an online quiz. Using the online quizzes promotes active learning, but we do not currently try to retrieve assessment data from these online quizzes.

This basic information provides the student with a foundation for the material that is covered in the English 1200 library sessions. In these sessions, we emphasize more focused research skills – Boolean operators; truncation; and selecting appropriate print materials. We try to use examples in the class that are relevant to that particular assignment and provide hands-on learning. It is important to differentiate between the two visits so that students whom we're serving for the second time can build on their previous knowledge and won't feel like they have only repeated their previous sessions. The difficulty arises from the fact that the library sessions are not required; we cannot be sure whether we will see the same students twice or only have them at either level.

In addition to classes held within the library's classrooms, instructional activities include an online research tutorial targeting beginners, web pages targeting research resources for classes in specific disciplines, a subject guide database, and a research consultation service. The online tutorial, called the "Seven-Step Guide to Library Research" is often integrated in part into English 1100 classes. The Coordinator of Instruction visits English instructors early in the semester to encourage them to bring their classes for library instruction, and to have their students go through the entire tutorial outside the library session, whether or not the class comes to the library. The tutorial includes topic selection, finding background information, searching the catalog (including how to read a call number), finding and evaluating articles in general databases, and a bibliography of style manuals. Each of the first four steps is hyperlinked to an online quiz, promoting self-evaluation by the learners.

Teaching librarians share handouts for common classes, especially English 1100 and 1200, but sometimes find that their preparation for a class requires a more specialized guide. Several of these more specialized guides have evolved into web pages for specific classes. Having them grouped together and accessible from one page on the library's server is an important organizational strategy. As we develop our instructional strategies, we may find reason to provide guidelines for content or appearance in these class web pages. We should also develop a means of evaluating student use other than simply web statistics.

Pirate Source is an additional online tool designed to guide students to good starting points for research in specified subjects. [3] Pirate Source is a customizable subject guide database, created and maintained by staff in the Joyner Library Reference Department, and named for our University mascot. Students select from one of 76 subject areas, and then specify the types of sources they need. Depending on the corresponding subject, source types include biographical materials, subject dictionaries and encyclopedias, recommended databases for finding articles or news, statistical or government information, reviews, criticism, organizations, and web sites. The reference/instruction librarian most familiar with the subject area maintains its record in Pirate Source, and teaching librarians will often point out this resource to students in class, in research consultations, and at the reference desk. Pirate Source's utility in a variety of teaching instances makes it an important instructional activity.

Demonstrating Pirate Source's utility by evaluation is difficult. Like the class web pages mentioned earlier, Pirate Source cannot be evaluated solely on number of time the pages were viewed, in large part because we cannot know whether the students retrieved any of the print materials, or effectively searched the recommended databases. Qualitative data from formal interviews or informal conversations thus becomes much more vital. Along with evaluation techniques, the means of using the evaluations—planning, maintenance, outreach activities to teach Pirate Source—all will benefit as we develop our Information Literacy umbrella.

Research consultations, since they put students and librarians face-to-face, provide more data for evaluation. Students needing individualized assistance on their research project are encouraged to schedule a research consultation by paper, phone, or online form. The Coordinator of Instruction receives these requests, assigns them to participating librarians, and logs the results. The participating librarian then prepares in advance for a half hour session with the student to help that student find suitable resources for the research project.

To help us improve our Research Consultation Service, a brief email questionnaire was sent to the 55 patrons who used the service during the Fall semester, 2002, and provided their email addresses. The response rate was 40%. According to the Fall 2002 survey results, 45% of the respondents stated that their professor suggested the service. An additional 27% learned of the service through the advertisement in the local student paper, *The East Carolinian*. The survey results indicate that 59% of the respondents felt greater confidence in using information sources as a result of the consultation. The same percentage stated that they would use the skills acquired in the consultation in the future.

These results indicate that individualized instruction should remain an important part of our Information Literacy initiatives. The Coordinator of Instruction has begun analyzing data from a survey sent for Spring 2003, and plans to continue evaluating this service. Publicity for the Research Consultation Service should continue to focus on teaching faculty (via listservs, email, and personal contact) and advertising in *The East Carolinian*, since these two methods combined for more than 2/3 of consultation referrals. Liaison librarians could also share information about the service in their newsletters or faculty meetings. Further evaluations may indicate additional directions for marketing this service, or matching librarian expertise with student inquiries. In addition, qualitative data help guide future instruction sessions by giving the librarians a better understanding of students' instructional needs.

Librarians and English instructors together promote one of our most exciting instructional programs: the W. Keats Sparrow English 1200 First-Year Writing Competition. This competition recognizes excellence in research and writing by students; an awards ceremony is held in the Fall for the top three winners, who receive cash prizes. The competition is an inexpensive way to promote library research skills, build partnerships with faculty in the English department, position the library as an active player in the undergraduate activities of the university and encourage and reward excellence among students. [4] Handouts outlining the submission requirements are handed out during instruction and the competition is promoted during a visit at the beginning of the semester with the English Department Teaching Assistants. This writing competition provides evidence of the collaboration required for instruction in information literacy, and will benefit from structural advances enabling better planning and evaluation.

Information Literacy Program-building

Instructional activities at Joyner will be improved through the construction of a structure that will coordinate our planning and evaluation—our Information Literacy umbrella, as it were. We have taken the first step by proposing an Information Literacy goal for the Reference Department's annual goals statement. This goal states that the Reference Department will develop a mission statement for our Information Literacy program and that we will work with selected faculty to develop a pilot program to integrate information literacy skills into the curricula. We have discussed this goal with instruction librarians in other public services departments. Next year, we will propose an Information Literacy goal for the Academic Library Services to consider for its annual statement of goals.

Next steps to address include examining our current instructional activities and how we may coordinate and evaluate them. Any discussion of coordinating activities must begin with shared goals. Currently, communication among librarians from various departments regarding instruction is informal. The Coordinator of Instruction maintains contact with librarians from other public services departments offering instruction, but we believe that with an Information Literacy objective spanning departments, this communication could be enhanced. We expect that programmatic structuring should lead to shared teaching techniques, common lesson plan templates, common evaluation forms, and an ability to target audiences more effectively. Teaching librarians from all departments could benefit from these advances, leading in turn to advances for our students.

In addition to improving current services, one of the most important aspects of program planning is ongoing growth, which requires targeting new audiences. An Information Literacy umbrella will bring together team members to plan for three new instructional opportunities: residence hall outreach, distance education, and a new "Degree in Three" program, which begins Fall 2003. Currently, one of the Instruction Librarians is creating an outreach program for one of the residence halls on campus. Steps involved include meeting with the dorm director to discuss the audience of incoming first-year students, their information needs, and ways to make the program enjoyable for them. With input from other librarians, we are writing an interactive, game-style program that will teach students the targeted skills in a fun format. It will be important to document the process and write clear lesson plans so that this program may be duplicated at other residence halls, or taught by other librarians.

Distance Education (DE) provides Joyner Library another user population to target for instructional outreach activities. This is timely, as DE is an emphasis for our new Chancellor and Provost. The library is moving ahead with plans to improve support for distance education students, including means of instructing off-campus users. Ideas include additional online tutorials, live online ("chat") reference, and approaching professors teaching DE classes, to incorporate library materials in their class offerings. We have begun training for Question Point, and expect to implement this live online reference service Fall 2003. The planning to support Information Literacy goals for DE students should benefit all students of the University, not only those involved in distance programs.

A proposal by our Provost suggests a third user group to target: students in the "Degree in Three" program. Beginning with the 2003-2004 school year, this program provides highly motivated students the opportunity to graduate in three years rather than the traditional four years. Librarians are currently drafting strategies to work effectively with program coordinators to anticipate and meet the information needs of this group of students. One tool for anticipating the needs of this user group is to know who they are as they arrive: the Degree in Three program targets "high caliber, highly motivated" students, and brings them to the University campus for a summer session orientation program. During this program, these students will occupy the same dormitory, orient to the campus, meet with their advisors, and take classes together. The library has three obvious roles during this orientation process: to offer a personal contact to students new to campus, to establish the library's role among the partnership that provides support for these students, and to teach time-saving research tips to motivated young scholars. As with existing instructional activities, evaluating efforts among these three new user groups will be important for improving service.

Future developments in our instructional program may depend on the strength of the structures we are now erecting. We believe that our Information Literacy umbrella gives us the means of bringing together our instructional activities in a coherent form, to articulate our goals, strategies, and evaluation measures to our administration and to the teaching faculty with whom we work. This coherence also allows us to be held accountable for developing our program in response to the needs of our students, our academic units, and our institution. Building our Instruction program's structure will also help us coordinate our planning, activities, and evaluation, develop consistent training procedures, and share what we are learning so that we effectively improve our services.

References

- [1] Abdulla, Ali and Lewis, Janice Steed. "Eight Steps for Developing a First-Year English Composition Award: A look at a successful program at East Carolina University." *College & Research Libraries News* 64 (4) April 2003: 238-240.
- [2] ACRL Task Force on Information Literacy Competency Standards, "Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education" (Chicago: ACRL, 2000). Cited May 27, 2003. Available at http://www.ala.org/Content/NavigationMenu/ACRL/Standards_and_Guidelines/Information_Literacy_Competency_Standards_for_Higher_Education.htm
- [3] Pirate Source is the subject of the following article: Nall, Clark, and Janice Steed Lewis. "Integrating Print and Electronic Resources: Joyner Library's 'Pirate Source,'" forthcoming in *Acquisitions Librarian*.
- [4] See above, Abdulla and Lewis, 240.