Continuous Assessment, the Catalyst for Building a Successful Information Literacy Program that Focuses on Student Needs

Jon R. Hufford and Arlene K. Paschel

Introduction

Because of the new emphasis on student learning-outcomes assessment and the inclusion of information literacy in the efforts of many colleges and universities to assess their programs and courses, librarians are now using assessment methods in their information literacy classes, whether these are credit courses or one-shot sessions. The data collected from these assessment efforts is being used to discover and meet the expectations of students, improve the content of information literacy courses and sessions, and develop the teaching skills of librarians. However, research on how continuous assessment can be used in a yearly cycle of planning, developing, marketing, implementing, assessing, reviewing, and improving an Information Literacy program is not well represented in the professional literature. This paper reviews developments in Texas Tech University Libraries' Information Literacy program, training for librarians who participate, the collaboration and outreach efforts to expand the program, and especially the important role that assessment plays in the process of continuously discovering student needs and improving content, teaching, learning, and the operation of the various parts of the program. The emphasis is on assessment as a catalyst in the process of continually improving the Information Literacy program.

Hufford *(Librarian, Information Services)* and
Paschel *(Assistant Librarian, Information Services)*
Texas Tech University [Lubbock, TX]

The Program

Texas Tech University Libraries has had a large Information Literacy program for several years. During the 2009/2010 academic year the librarians involved in instruction gave a total of 1,260 sessions, with a total of 21,092 students who benefited from the instruction (See Table 1 for the program's statistics for 2009/2010). The total number of sessions included one-shot database demonstrations, workshops, tours, one-on-one consultations, and all sessions of the program's one-hour credit course "Introduction to Library Research (LIBR 1100)."

Many of the demonstrations and tours were for College Rhetoric, Freshman Seminar, and XL "Strategies for Learning" classes offered to students experiencing academic difficulties. Additionally, all of the librarians involved in the Information Literacy program provide database demonstrations and tours to students and faculty in their role as liaisons to academic departments on campus, and these sessions were also included in the statistics. Most of the students opting for the one-on-one consultations were graduate students, though the number of undergraduates requesting consultations has been increasing in recent years. Finally, the librarians taught 14 sections of LIBR 1100 in 2009/2010.

In sum, Texas Tech librarians gave 399 one-shot database demonstrations, 118 tours, and 561 one-on-one consultations in 2009/2010. Following the recommendation of the Association of Research Libraries, the Library counts each class meeting of each section of its credit course as an instruction session, and multiplies the number of students enrolled in a course section by the number of class meetings for a total of student attendance. The total number of course sessions and student attendance in the sections are added to the program's statistics. The 14 sections of LIBR 1100 had a course

enrollment of 339 students. This amounted to 182 sessions in which 4,746 students were taught.

Furthermore, all the librarians who teach in the Information Literacy program are aware of the importance of the Association of College and Research Libraries *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (2000), and are encouraged to set goals for meeting the *Standards* in all of their sessions. Several of the *Standards* are addressed when they teach a section of the program's one-hour credit course. However, it is more challenging to do so in a one-shot session. Nevertheless, several of the *Standards* are addressed in a basic, introductory manner in these sessions.

Training for Librarians

Various opportunities are available for Texas Tech librarians to receive training to enhance their teaching skills and help them improve the student learning that takes place in their classroom. As is the case on many campuses, Texas Tech University has a Teaching, Learning, and Technology Center (TLTC) that exists to help professors improve their teaching. The Center offers not only several workshops and seminars each semester that are designed to improve teaching skills, but also sessions where faculty are trained in the use of the new technologies that support teaching. Texas Tech librarians have faculty status so they attend many of these TLTC workshops and seminars. Librarians use Blackboard to support LIBR 1100 activities. They obtain their Blackboard accounts and are trained in the use of Blackboard by the TLTC staff.

Another teaching and learning support facility on campus is the Advanced Technology Learning Center (ATLC). This Center supports all persons affiliated with Texas Tech, including students, faculty, and staff. Librarians often attend training sessions offered by ATLC each semester where they learn to use software programs available on campus. Several of these programs are applicable to the teaching and learning taking place at the University.

Working with a mentor is another opportunity available to librarians. For several years, the Information Literacy program leaders had assigned teams of one experienced and one inexperienced librarian to teach each section of LIBR 1100. Both mentor and mentee usually benefited from this team teaching. In recent years in order to offer more sections of LIBR 1100, each librarian has been teaching a section on her own. Nevertheless, mentoring still takes place among LIBR 1100 instructors because they all recognize the value of sharing their knowledge and experiences at regular instructor meetings. In the case of one-shot sessions, librarians who are new to teaching are asked to observe a few classes given by more experienced librarians who act as mentors during this initial stage of getting ready to teach.

Though the same course content is taught in all the sections of LIBR 1100, the librarians are encouraged to work independently. They are also encouraged to try different teaching strategies, including, but not limited to: lecturing, giving assignments that promote class interest and participation, using readily understood examples to teach difficult concepts, and generally supporting active learning whenever possible. All the librarians teaching LIBR 1100 enthusiastically embrace this independence and experiential approach to teaching.

Collaboration and Outreach

Texas Tech's Information Services librarians have liaison responsibilities to the University's academic departments. One responsibility is working with faculty to acquire the resources they need to support their teaching and research. Another is providing instruction to their faculty's students in the use of these resources, especially searching databases. Creating a successful and growing information literacy instruction presence in their academic departments requires an emphasis on collaboration and outreach on the part of the Information Services librarians. This instruction usually occurs as one-shot sessions in a professor's classroom.

Over the years individual librarians have been assigned responsibility for maintaining collaborative relationships with the administrators of the College Rhetoric, Freshman Seminar, and XL "Strategies for Learning" programs to make sure the Library continuously plays an important role providing library instruction to the students enrolled in all the classes of these programs. The lesson plans and library assignments are developed by the librarians, and they provide the one-shot sessions for all of these classes. These collaborative relationships have been consistently successful.

In recent years the Library has offered as many as a dozen or more sections of its one-hour credit course LIBR 1100 during each fall semester, and around 4 or 5 sections in the spring semester. Usually around 30 students enroll in each of these sections. The growth in the number of sections offered and in the number of students enrolled is due to the efforts of the Information Services Department Head who has networked with key administrators on campus and has convinced them of the importance of information literacy for students enrolled at Texas Tech University.

In July of 2008, Texas Tech University's Office of the Provost set up a Core Curriculum Committee with responsibility "for establishing program-level core curriculum learning objectives and planning their assessment" (TTU Office of the Provost, 2011). The Committee established core area committees responsible for discipline areas that offer core courses. One of these smaller committees is the Communication Core Area Committee. It is responsible for the learning objectives and assessments of core courses, such as the English Department's College Rhetoric courses, which include writing or oral presentation assignments.

A librarian was placed on the Communication Core Area Committee in 2009. When the time comes for this Committee to reassess its communication learning-outcome objectives for its core courses in 2011, this librarian will work with the other Committee members to synthesize the learning-outcome objectives of the Library's Information Literacy program with the Communication Core Area Committee's

objectives for its core courses. This collaborative effort on the part of the librarian and the teaching faculty on the Committee, if successful, will lead to the incorporation of the outcomes included in the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* into the learning-outcome objectives of all the communication core courses on campus. This will lead to a greater impact of the Library's Information Literacy program on the University's academic programs.

Continuous Assessment

Texas Tech University Libraries has undergone various evaluations over the years, including graduating student exit surveys, in which library services have been evaluated along with several other campus services, periodic LibQual surveys, and surveys administered to sample selections of students and faculty following one-shot information literacy sessions. The exit and LibQual surveys never covered information literacy adequately, and in fact all of these surveys measured subjectively what participants felt about services and never objectively assessed what students were learning from information literacy instruction given by a librarian. It has always been difficult to discover a workable way to conduct student learning-outcomes assessment of the one-shot database demonstrations, tours, and one-on-one consultations.

Student exit and LibQual surveys will continue to play a role in assessing Texas Tech Libraries' services. These surveys, among other things, offer library users an opportunity to criticize (or praise) the instruction given by librarians. Librarians responsible for the Information Literacy program should take into account all assessments, even subjective assessments, as they try to find out where improvements are needed.

On the other hand, Texas Tech librarians will soon take a new approach to assessing a portion of the one-shot sessions and consultations in order to facilitate meeting their goal of continuous assessment. The University's core area committees use TracDat, an assessment management system, to store information about the core courses for which they are responsible. In particular, TracDat helps faculty design, document, and report assessments. It not only records information about student achievement of learning outcomes but also documents faculty decisions, actions, and what the faculty have learned. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the librarian who is a member of the Communications Core Area Committee will soon be working with other Committee members to incorporate outcomes of the ACRL *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* into the learning outcome objectives of the University's communication core courses. When this is done, librarians will be able to find out through TracDat what students enrolled in the College Rhetoric classes and other core classes are learning in their one-shot information literacy sessions.

Every year since LIBR 1100 was first offered in 1998, each section of the course has been evaluated by its students in terms of the course content and the instructor's teaching using a standard machine-readable form. All classes taught on campus use the same form. These student evaluations of instructors record subjective judgments. They were never used as a means of objectively assessing what the students were learning in the course.

However LIBR 1100 has internal instruments within the course that actually assess what students are learning. Short quizzes following the readings assess comprehension. Also, several hands-on practicums require the performance of skills, and students have to compile an annotated bibliography on a topic of their choice. Both the practicums and the bibliography constitute authentic performance assessments of skills the librarians want their students to learn. These three instruments will continue to be used for the foreseeable future. Librarians will soon complete scoring rubrics for the practicums and bibliography assignment to insure that students in all sections of LIBR 1100 are assessed using the same criteria. Also since the fall of 2008, LIBR 1100 instructors have been measuring student learning outcomes with pre- and post-assessment surveys. The purpose of these surveys is to determine as objectively as possible whether students enrolled in LIBR 1100 are learning what the instructors teaching the course intended for them to learn. These internal instruments have been and will continue to be used to assist in attaining the program's goal of continuous assessment.

Librarians who teach in the Information Literacy program participate as team members in the process of continuously discovering student needs and expectations; improving the course's content, teaching, and learning; and improving the operation of the various parts of the program. This team effort has evolved over the years into a structured yearly cycle of planning, developing, marketing, implementing, assessing, and improving all aspects of the program. The data collected from the various assessment instruments used in the program play an important role in the process. The librarians are now using the seven stages of Megan Oakleaf's (2009) information literacy instruction assessment cycle as a model in the process. These stages include reviewing learning goals, identifying learning outcomes, creating learning activities, enacting learning activities, gathering data to check learning, interpreting data, and enacting decisions (Oakleaf, 2009, p. 541-545). The stages are incorporated into the process when and where feasible. However, the librarians foresee that her cycle will not be useful as a model for some portions of the program.

Texas Tech University Libraries' Information Literacy program will use assessment management systems in the near future as a means of efficiently and effectively managing some portions of the process that takes place in the yearly cycle. TracDat will be used to track student learning in the University's College Rhetoric and other communication core courses, and Blackboard Learn, the assessment module in Blackboard, will track students enrolled in LIBR 1100 (Oakleaf, 2011, p. 76-77). These systems will eventually facilitate accurate reporting of the Library's impact at Texas Tech University.

Conclusion

Texas Tech librarians are taking an experimental approach to managing, assessing, and improving their Information Literacy program and are committed to trying several assessment instruments that have the potential of providing useful findings. In doing this, the librarians will address such issues as how to identify new instruments in the literature, how to determine which are appropriate and will assist them in reaching their program's goals and vision, and how to incorporate this experimental approach to assessment into the program's yearly cycle. They will emphasize their use of assessment as a catalyst in their goal of continually improving the Information Literacy program.

References

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Table 1

Information Literacy/Outreach Statistics
2009-2010

Individual Contributions					Virtual Tours		*LIBR 1100		
Name	**Demos/Tours**	**Students**	**LIBR 1100**		**Month**	**Stu.**	**Section**	**Stu.**	**14**
			Sess.	**Stu.**	Sept		F1	28	
	97	570			Oct		F2	30	
	36	521	14	350	Nov		F3	30	
	340	518	14	392	Dec		F4	29	
	24	234	14	420	Jan		F5	29	
	3	28	28	602	Feb		F6	5	
	47	1232	28	840	Mar		F7	25	
	63	1146			Apr		F8	10	
	52	1951	14	308	May		F9	30	
	96	3017			June		F10	14	
	4	51			Jul		F270	22	
	58	669	14	420	Aug				
	50	1076	14	70			S1	28	
	12	124	14	532			S2	30	
	60	939	14	420			S3	29	
	136	4270	28	812					
			28	798			***Sess.**		***Stu.**
Totals	**1078**	**16346**				**0**	**182**		**4746**
	% of T	**% of T**				**% of T**	**% of T**	**Total Stu.**	**% of T**
	85.5	**77.5**				**0.00**	**14.5**	**339**	**22.5**

* ARL recommends counting each class meeting of a credit course as an LI session, and multiplying the number of students taking the credit course by the number of class meetings for total student attendance.

Total Stu.	**21092**
Total Sess.	**1260**

Undergrad Stu		Graduate Stu		Outreach	
Sess.	**Stu.**	**Sess.**	**Stu.**	**Sess.**	**Stu.**
438	9178	161	1202	479	5967
% of T	**% of T**	**% of T**	**% of T**	**% of T**	**% of T**
34.8	43.5	12.8	5.7	38.0	28.3
FS		**1301/1302**		**XL**	
Sess.	**Stu.**	**Sess.**	**Stu.**	**Sess.**	**Stu.**
110	2729	21	319	46	1169
% of T	**% of T**	**% of T**	**% of T**	**% of T**	**% of T**
8.7	12.9	1.7	1.5	3.7	5.5
Tours		**One-on-ones**		**Demos**	
Sess.	**Stu.**	**Sess.**	**Stu.**	**Sess.**	**Stu.**
118	2267	561	561	399	13519
% of T	**% of T**	**% of T**	**% of T**	**% of T**	**% of T**
9.4	10.7	44.5	2.7	31.7	64.1