

Who Do We Teach?

Freshman First Year Experience vs. Upper Division Courses in the Major

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To teach or not to teach is not the question. Librarians as faculty teach. We teach at reference. We teach in the classroom. It could even be argued that we teach in the process of organizing information and resources. Who to teach or where to teach really is the question. More to the point, perhaps 'tis nobler to teach upper division courses in the major and concentrate on training the first year experience (FYE) faculty to teach basic information literacy skills to first year students. By relying on faculty in conjunction with online tutorials and course delivery software, librarians can collaboratively administer to the needs of first year students while concentrating in-class teaching on upper division students who are engaged in mastering their discipline.

Although FYE, or what was freshman composition, has generally been the target area for library instruction, these courses may not be the best place to devote a library's limited teaching resources. While it may be blasphemous to suggest that information literacy and first year experience are not synonymous, I would readily point out that an upper division student requires a substantially higher level of proficiency than what is needed by a first year student.

While information literacy has a place in FYE, that place generally concentrates on skills such as where to go to find a book or an article or which databases will allow a student to find a full text article. Is a librarian needed to teach basic skills? Too often, librarians are scheduled for one short period of time and asked to completely prepare students for their entire academic and professional career. Clearly, this is an impossible task. We rarely teach "just in time" because we are teaching "when there is time." We have a limited amount of time to

teach, so sequencing and chunking information successfully is difficult at best. We strive to promote high level information literacy concepts, but struggle with assignments that do not reflect our intent. If we taught a credit course, we would be more successful. However, few if any students would choose to take an optional course.

So who do we serve? The first year student requires a degree of competency to progress toward upper division, but further development is needed once these students enter their major. The skills learned in a first year class do not necessarily transfer nor prepare students at the next level. It is a foundational beginning at best. At the next level, students need to learn to predict and respond to search results. Research is about more than getting the full text for a few articles. It is about managing resources to engage in original thinking. An FYE student tries to find information to support an idea. An upper division student tries to find information to discover something beyond the original thought.

The tack librarians take in teaching information literacy is of fundamental importance. An easy solution is to just teach all students when they need instruction. A robust information literacy program for FYE lays the foundation for upper division courses in the major. Subject librarians then teach students in their discipline. While this is an attractive solution, there are flaws at the basic level. Most librarians and departmental faculty are continually asked to do more with less. With everything librarians do in the course of a day, we cannot teach everyone. We must rely on alliances and collaboration with faculty while prioritizing our teaching mission.

What could librarians do to attend to the needs of the freshman level students? Enhancing

partnerships with faculty—all faculty—translates into stepping out beyond the library. We will serve on the teaching, learning, and assessment teams at our institutions. Our roles will blur to serve positions inside and outside the library. We will support teaching in the classroom with online tutorials and other 24/7 “just in time” instruction tools. We will be innovators on campus—using the course delivery software such as Blackboard to not only teach but to assess student learning. The train the teacher model is highly effective, but only when librarians become the “go-to” people on campus. We need to be the leaders and cut the edge in teaching and learning. In this environment, information literacy will be an institutional goal like writing, critical thinking, communication, and civic engagement. All students will have to demonstrate competency, and what librarians strive to achieve in information fluency and lifelong learning for students will be a mutual goal for all.

Step-by-step Teaching

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As a way to tie this all together, we posted a PowerPoint slide that asked for personal reflection. We asked them to think about which teaching methods did they choose most? Were they active learning, cooperative learning, discovery, lecture, problem-based, reflective, or student centered? And then in light of that, which teaching methods did they best respond to? To help with that, we asked them to recall the best teacher they had or the best learning experience they had. We wanted people to think about individual learning styles and individual teaching styles.

The workshop was a definite success. The attendees came away with many ideas of how to modify their personal teaching styles to incorporate different tasks and activities to achieve their learning outcomes.

—Look for part 3 of this series articles from George Washington University in volume 32(4).

Ross' Rave

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every means I have to shake up the flock. That's why I took this gig.

If I may cite from the Good Book, (ACRL's Information Literacy Competency Standards) (Standard 5: Verse 3)

The information literate student determines whether the new knowledge has an impact on the individual's value system and takes steps to reconcile the difference.

The next morning, hoping to start the day with a sunnier attitude, I opened my email messages. Some were offering to lower my mortgage, others to raise my you-know-what! Scattered among them were a half dozen questions

from students. Mostly, they read like this:

“im very sorry to bother you but i would like to see if can help me find some information about immigration, why are they immigrating and since when. I would appreciate your help.”

One by one I responded gracefully to them all. Just before I left my office for another rounds of classes, another email arrived.

“Hi... I was in that class yesterday. I'm the guy doing Wackenhut. I saw this article that said that they got this huge contract to guard nuclear power plants, but this other thing i read said that the goverment says that they don't do a good job. So what's up with that? That would be a “threat” right?”

“You bet,” I replied. :)