

# GRAPHIC NOVELS AND INTRODUCTION TO LIBRARY RESEARCH

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## INTRODUCTION

Library 1100: Introduction to Library Research is a one-hour credit course for information literacy that Texas Tech University Libraries have offered for over ten years. Its primary goal is to prepare and expose students to the various methods of doing research that benefit them throughout their college careers and on to graduate school or in the working world. It is taught primarily by the librarians in the Research, Instruction, and Outreach Department. It is technically a freshman-level course, but occasionally non-freshmen, and even the rare graduate student, will enroll. It serves as an elective for most students, although those in legal studies have to take it as part of their required curriculum. Students are graded and receive academic credit for taking this course.

## SUMMARY OF CONTENT TAUGHT IN LIBRARY 1100: INTRODUCTION TO LIBRARY RESEARCH

The course is designed to take students through all the different kinds and uses of information. There is a standard curriculum that all librarians follow, although how they teach it is up to them. The class begins with a brief overview of the various libraries that serve Texas Tech University, including the Preston Smith Medical Library, the Law Library and Southwest Collection Archives, which contains primary source documents pertaining to Texas and West Texas, as well as material related to Texas Tech University. Texas Tech also houses the Vietnam Center and Archive. Students are then introduced to the

concept of the Information Cycle, which explains how a single piece of groundbreaking news goes from being posted on the Internet as a news item or on a social network like Facebook, to newspapers or magazines and is often eventually analyzed in a scholarly journal or a monograph six months to a year later. Some of the most important concepts taught include explaining to students that it is imperative to evaluate information and be skeptical from the beginning. Some, but not all, of the librarians find it useful to use the CRAAP test to illustrate why it is vital that students think critically about the information (Meriam, 2010). The CRAAP test, developed by the Meriam Library at California State University, stands for Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose. A useful website to try out the CRAAP test, *All About Explorers*, illustrates that not everything found on the Internet is the gospel truth and that, in fact, there is often information posted online maliciously. While *All About Explorers* was designed by teachers (Aungst, 2006-2012) to teach students to think critically about Internet sources, students often get a kick out of seeing the *All About Explorers* website, particularly the entry on Christopher Columbus.

Other concepts taught include citing resources correctly and the pitfalls of plagiarism, advanced searching techniques, and how to navigate the research process. In addition, students are taught to understand the different formats in which information can be found, such as scholarly journals, popular magazines, newspapers, monographs and ebooks, government documents, and online resources.

## SEQUENTIAL ART AND EDUCATION

Before 2010, one of the observations from class and reflected on end-of-semester evaluations is that students often found the content dry and boring. It was very difficult to engage them in the material and to make it interesting for

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them. It occurred to us that perhaps one method to enhance the content in a small way would be to use animation and sequential art (a fancy word for comics). This idea came to light when a former colleague at Texas Tech, Dr. Jeremy Short, co-authored a business management textbook in sequential art format. Short had some very positive success with the *Atlas Black* series (Short, 2009-2010). Other examples of textbooks done in the sequential art format include a freshman seminar guide, *University Life: A College Survival Story* and *Super Powered Word Study*, a text to improve vocabulary (Payne, 2011; Carter 2011). Using sequential art to teach educational concepts and ideas is not a new notion. The *Classics Illustrated* series dating back to the 1940s used comics to introduce students to the world's great literature and helped teach them to read (and also had educational comics related to science and history) (Jones, 2011). The government and the military have also been using the sequential art format since the 1940s to teach concepts and ideas (Graham 2011; Fitzgerald, 2009). Companies like SmarterComics are putting classic texts such as Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* and modern classics such as Tom Hopkins *Think and Grow Rich* and Karen Berman & Joe Knight's *Financial Intelligence* into the sequential art format. Their rationale is threefold:

The visual power of comics combined with text helps you to:

1. Save time, as your brain understands ideas much faster
2. Remember longer, as the ideas are visually illustrated
3. Have fun while getting smarter (FAQ 2011).

Note that some university libraries have made use of sequential art to explain how to use the library and related library concepts (even using zombies) (Upson, 2011; Evans 2010; Zabarsky, 2009).

## **LIBRARY 1100: SUPPLEMENT**

While the purpose of this article is not to give a full historical account of educational comics, the above examples illustrate that there is precedent for using comics in the classroom. After we discussed the possibilities of using sequential art and animation to supplement the content of Library 1100, we had to try and find an artist who would illustrate the content we wanted to use. Texas Tech University Libraries has its own separate Communications and Marketing Department, which employs an animator/artist on staff. We proposed "borrowing" their animator, Kevin Jones, to illustrate what became our mini-information literacy graphic novel. Mr. Jones spent considerable time in the summer of 2010 working our scripts into sequential art form.

## **CONTENT OF THE GRAPHIC NOVEL**

We wanted Mr. Jones to be as creative as possible with the scripts we gave him. There are three main characters in our book: Student X, Awesome Librarian, and Professor Pop.

Michael Jackson was used as the focus for Student X's research project. The content emphasized includes:

1. How to find books, magazines, and journals in the Texas Tech Library System and the Information Cycle
2. Citing resources
3. The research process (see Appendix A)
4. The difference between scholarly articles and popular magazines, and finding scholarly articles using databases and Texas Tech's personal librarians
5. Using online sources/databases, public vs. invisible Web, and Texas Tech's personal librarian concept

We wanted to start off with this content which we felt was the most basic and fundamental to the course (Information cycle/citing resources). With Kevin Jones illustrating, a "mini-graphic novel" was created, which is not a replacement for the content/curriculum that is already in place, but rather a supplement. As this project is still in its infancy, only certain sections of the course content were chosen to be used for the "mini-graphic novel." The hope is to someday put together a complete information literacy graphic novel. In addition to providing students with a paper copy of the "mini-graphic novel," relevant sections are also incorporated into the PowerPoint lecture presentations.

## **PERSONAL LIBRARIAN CONCEPT**

The Personal Librarian concept is the brainchild of the Research, Information & Outreach Department Head, Laura Heinz. When Ms. Heinz took over the department, one of the changes implemented was to take the subject librarians off of the reference desk (Heinz, 2011). Two general reference librarians were subsequently hired and would refer in-depth reference questions to the appropriate subject librarian. Each major, or in some cases individual college or department, has a personal librarian designated to serve both the student and faculty population.

## **XTRANORMAL**

*Xtranormal* is an online site where one may create a movie by choosing characters and typing in text. *Xtranormal* is relatively simple to use and free to join. There are additional characters, and other "extras" may be purchased for a cost. For more information about *Xtranormal*, visit [xtranormal.com](http://www.xtranormal.com).

Using *Xtranormal*, several movie shorts were created to supplement the PowerPoints and class lectures as well as the graphic novel. Characters differed in each movie, and the text was kept simple and short. Two examples of how we used this tool are available at: <http://www.xtranormal.com/watch/6903645/> & <http://www.xtranormal.com/watch/6903651/>

## SCAVENGER HUNT

When discussing using the Internet and online resources, another related teaching tool used is a scavenger hunt questionnaire. The content is related to sequential art/film and popular culture. This is counted as an extra credit assignment, but all students have to complete it (again, this is supplement to regular content). Students do this in class and are not allowed to use Google or Wikipedia to answer the questions. It is meant to be a fun exercise and to teach students to think “beyond Google and Wikipedia” so that they are actually exposed to other modes of searching and how to find detailed answers to queries. At first we wondered whether this was a useful exercise, until we saw that some students actually had to think about and strategize how they were going to find the answers (see Appendix B).

## SURVEY RESULTS

While we have used the “mini-graphic novel,” *Xtranormal* animations, and the scavenger hunt in at least five classes, only three classes have been surveyed. We wanted to do the surveys a year apart because we felt we could get better data that way. We surveyed two classes in the fall of 2010 and one class in the fall of 2011. For the survey questions, see Appendix C.

Comments on the class were favorable. Overall, students liked the addition of the graphic novel and *Xtranormal*, with the majority preferring the graphic novel to the movies. 83% of students responded that they found the *Xtranormal* videos to enhance the class, while 17% disagreed. As far as students wanting to see an *Xtranormal* video for each section of the class, the results were almost split, with 55% agreeing and 45% disagreeing. Overwhelmingly students felt that the lessons in graphic novel form enhanced and explained the lessons, with 93% agreeing and only 7% disagreeing. When asked what could be improved in the class, several comments were made regarding technical aspects, which are often out of the purview of the instructor’s capabilities. A brief sampling of some the comments include:

*There’s an effort made to appeal to students.*

*I enjoyed that the class is not too stressful but is full with knowledge on how to research and also how to use the library.*

*I now know how to surf through the library website without running into troubles.*

*I like the way that we are able to work through things together. That way if I have any questions, I can ask them, and then actually learn something.*

## CONCLUSION

Library 1100: Introduction to Library Research is a very beneficial course for students of all levels. Survey results and comments for the course have been encouraging after the inclusion of the graphic novel and *Xtranormal* movies. While

survey results reflected that students liked *Xtranormal* movies, the movies were not as well received as the graphic novel. This is a work in progress and we hope to eventually share this material with the wider library world and academic community. Looking to the future, these authors hope to create and implement a full graphic novel information literacy textbook for the course. Further assessment on the graphic novel style needs to be collected in order to support the need for a full novel.

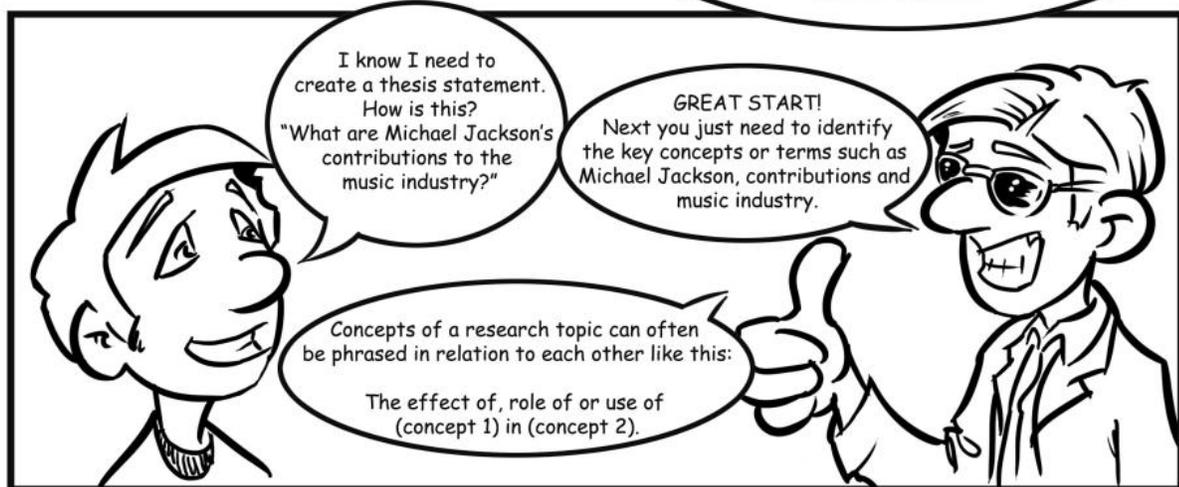
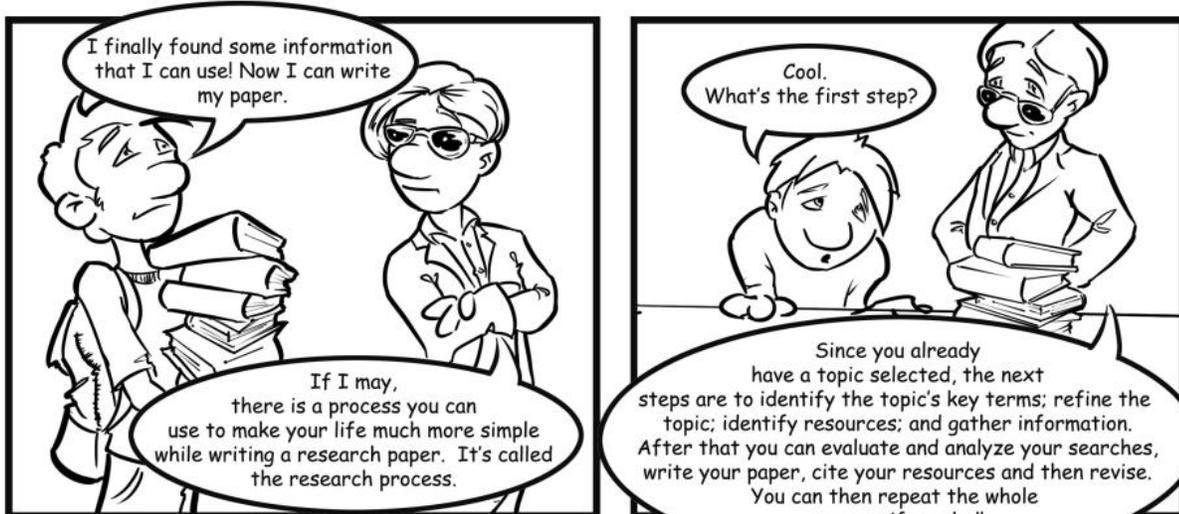
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**APPENDIX A:**  
**INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROCESS: ART BY KEVIN JONES**



## APPENDIX B: INTERNET SCAVENGER HUNT

YOU CANNOT USE GOOGLE OR WIKIPEDIA

PLEASE CHOOSE ANOTHER SEARCH ENGINE (ALTA VISTA; YAHOO; LYCOS, WEBCRAWLER, ETC.,)

GO TO SEARCH ENGINE LIST

<http://www.thesearchenginelist.com/>

OR

<http://searchenginewatch.com/2156221>

- 1) What is the name of the first Flash?
- 2) What comic book did the 2<sup>nd</sup> Flash first appear?
- 3) What year did the first issue of *Mille the Model* appear?
- 4) What is the name of the first patriotic superhero (hint it is NOT Captain America)?
- 5) Who wrote the *Miss Fury* comics?
- 6) Which graphic novel won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992?
- 7) What is the name of the person who was a Spider-Man/Peter Parker clone?
- 8) Which Superhero did President Obama team up with?
- 9) What movie franchise was also a Dark Horse Comic book series? (HINT the first movie starred Sigourney Weaver)!
- 10) What is the significance of *Amazing Fantasy 15*
- 11) Who created Captain America?
- 12) Who created the character of Blade the Vampire Hunter?
- 13) Which actor played the Joker in the 1960s Batman series?
- 14) What is Wonder Woman's "real" name? Who played her in the television series during the 1970s?
- 15) What are the names of two Ghost Riders? (There are actually several major Ghost Riders, but two names are fine).
- 16) What actor played Captain America in the 1990 Movie? Who played Red Skull in *Captain America: The First Avenger*
- 17) Who created the series *The Walking Dead*?
- 18) Which actor played Green Lantern in the feature film?

Extra Credit questions!

What Band does Angry Anderson sing for? Where are they from?

Before Motorhead, what is the name of the band that Lemmy played with?

Who was the Beatles first bass player? (It was NOT Paul McCartney). What was the band's name before the Beatles?

What is the biggest box office Superhero movie of all time?

What is the name of the first Green Lantern?

## APPENDIX C

### LIBR 1100 - Graphic Novel Component

**1. Did you find the Xtranormal videos an enhancement to the class? Did you find them interesting?**

- a. Agree
- b. Disagree

**2. Would you have liked an Xtranormal video for all sections of the class?**

- a. Agree
- b. Disagree

**3. What did you think about the lessons in the graphic novel form, did they enhance and explain the lessons?**

- a. Agree
- b. Disagree

**4. Would you like to see all of the content in graphic novel textbook form?**

- a. Agree
- b. Disagree

**5. Do you think both the animation and the graphic novel text enhance the class?**

- a. Agree
- b. Disagree

**6. Do you feel that taking this class has somehow prepared you to do more research for your future classes?**

- a. Agree
- b. Disagree

**7. How do you think the content can be improved?**

**8. What did you like most about this class?**

**9. What did you like least about this class?**

**10. How could the class be improved?**