

# WHEN THE WORLD GROWS SMALLER: RENEWING INSTRUCTION METHODS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

The overall growth of international students attending American universities continues to rise as discussed in the *Open Doors* report, published annually by the Institute of International Education (IIE). In 2006-2007, the total number of international students rose by 3.2% to 582,984 students, with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign hosting the fourth largest population of international students in the United States (IIE, 2007). Students at the University of Illinois are primarily graduate students from Asian countries and study a variety of disciplines, particularly engineering, business and the physical and life sciences. International students bring culture and diversity to a land-grant institution environment that is dominated by in-state students.

Curry and Copeman (2005) document that there are several barriers to effective reference service for international students and these principles can be applied to instructional sessions as well. The most obvious barriers continue to be factors in language use, including insufficient proficiency, lack of vocabulary, and variations in pronunciation. Although international students are required to take and pass the language proficiency TOEFL exam, many are overwhelmed by the intensity of academe and the cultural adaptations required by living in a new country. International students may come to the United States with a well-rounded view of what to expect during their graduate studies, however American libraries add a layer of complexity with open bookstacks, interlibrary loan, classification systems and library jargon. International students may also be unfamiliar with the role of reference librarian in academic studies (Kumar & Suresh, 2000). This session explores the role of the library during this transitional period and strategies for how librarians can incorporate active learning in order to reach a multitude of learning styles.

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## INTERACTIVE LOEX SESSION

This interactive workshop during the LOEX conference engaged participants on the topic of renewing instruction methods for English as a Second Language (ESL) students using the Cephalonian Method of orientation (Morgan & Davies, 2004). Many of the ideas could also be applied in almost any academic library setting. Using a combination of audience participation, visuals and music, the session moved through four major topic areas:

- Learning styles and characteristics of ESL learners and international students (red question cards)
- Innovative instruction segments using tutorials, activities and games (yellow question cards)
- Background information on how Illinois overhauled its previous model of course-integrated ESL instruction (purple question cards)
- Assessment models used to gain an authentic review of ESL library instruction (green question cards)

Upon arrival, each participant was given color-coded index cards containing questions related to the above topics. The session leader asked participants to read their questions in random order by color. A corresponding slide presentation was used to visually illustrate the main points of each question. The Cephalonian Method incorporates active learning strategies including a built-in ice breaker while maintaining a fresh and imaginative learning environment by engaging attendees through a question and answer period. The session combined ideas from the presenter with those of the attendees. For example, during the section on innovative instruction segments, the presenter demonstrated selected online games and tutorials used during Illinois ESL instruction classes.

Examples of instructional and fun videos, in-class activities and games can be found online at <http://uiuc.libguides.com/loex>.

## ESL INSTRUCTION AT ILLINOIS

Each semester, the reference librarians at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign teach course-integrated one-shot instruction sessions for *ESL 500: Oral and Written Communication* and *ESL 501: Introduction to Academic Writing* to incoming graduate level international students (approximately 175-200 students across all sessions). As noted by Howze & Moore (2003), early exposure to academic libraries can help to offset library insecurity. TOEFL exam scores determine which students are required to take these sessions, with a majority of the students testing out of ESL 500. At the campus level, each course is taught by a teaching assistant who designs an assignment meant to improve the research and communication skills of the students in the course. The teaching assistant communicates that assignment to the library liaison so that specific example search strategies can be tailored to the session.

Previous assessment of the ESL 500 and ESL 501 sessions concluded that student questions center around circulations policies, general services and reference assistance. The lecture method used in previous semesters was unsuccessful in providing a complete understanding of library services and did not encourage the students to interact with the librarian teaching the instruction session. In addition, it is a struggle to cover basic information in ESL 500 without having to repeat the same teaching points in ESL 501. In an effort to provide general orientation materials as well as put a friendly face on the library and the services it provides, an overhaul of the program occurred in Fall 2007.

## LEARNING STYLES

In 1987, Reid's study on perceptual learning styles of ESL students stated that learners overwhelmingly prefer to learn using the kinesthetic and tactile learning styles. Kinesthetic and tactile learners engage the learning process most effectively while participating in activities that involve all of the senses. Learning opportunities include role playing, model building and mastering skills through imitation and practice. Joyce and Hodges (1966) suggest that "a teacher who can purposefully exhibit a wide range of teaching styles is potentially able to accomplish more than a teacher whose repertoire is relatively limited" (p. 409). In the same vein, Haynes (2006) argues that the best way to reach past the barriers of language is to address as many learning styles as possible in the classroom. She identifies six learning styles:

- auditory
- visual
- tactile
- kinesthetic
- global
- analytic

In order to address multiple learning styles for each concept, content should be presented through a variety of activities. This will inevitably lead to some overlap in content but will reinforce learning in an environment where students may require repetition. For example, Boolean concepts are particularly difficult for non-native English speakers. By illustrating a series of strategies such as Human Boolean, Venn Diagrams and Boolify (<http://boolify.org/>), students are provided with the foundation in which to apply the concept to future searching strategies. There are two benefits in teaching to a multitude of learning styles during library instruction. First, by incorporating a variety to learning activities, the session will reach more students in their individual preferred learning style, as well as introduce students to a variety of learning styles. Second, the session will overcome cultural barriers to participation by encouraging international students to pose questions and participate in group work rather than leaning on a traditional auditory learning style that may not be conducive to learning for non-native English speakers.

## INNOVATIVE INSTRUCTION PRACTICES

The Cephalonian Method was adapted from the travel industry by Cardiff University for orientation purposes (Morgan & Davies, 2004). The method presents a unique way to engage a multitude of learners while covering a wide variety of information. The Reference Library instruction librarian decided to pilot a version of this teaching method in order to revamp and revitalize its graduate level ESL course-integrated instruction.

The Cephalonian Method incorporates a variety of activities in the classroom including music, video, games, discussion, demonstration, practice and, most importantly, questions. After developing the learning goals for the session, the components of the class were divided into four categories: general orientation, circulation policies, locating library materials, and fun facts about the University Library. Questions were formulated using clear language and appropriate humor along with a corresponding slide presentation. The questions were written on color-coded index cards which the librarian distributed at the start of the session, providing an opportunity to welcome each student as they entered the classroom. The combination of the slides and questions supports both auditory and visual learning styles as well as encourages active participation for international students who may be uncomfortable speaking in an unfamiliar environment.

The Cephalonian Method is a good fit for ESL instruction because it allows a librarian instructor to reach medium to large groups of students while covering a substantial amount of material. The method encourages immediate interaction between students and the librarian, breaking down the communication barriers that can intimidate many international students. The library classroom cultivates a self-directed environment in which ESL students can improve their language learning skills through listening, speaking

and reading. (Bordonaro, 2006). Finally, it is a user-centered instruction method where no two sessions are the same, incorporating the element of surprise for both the teacher and the learner.

Other innovative methods of instruction can be incorporated into the Cephalonian Method, including adding fun or instructional videos, vocabulary games, in-class activities and ice-breaker activities. For example, videos (<http://youtube.com/uiuclearnlib>) can be an entertaining way to stimulate conversation about simple orientation topics or more complicated issues such as plagiarism. Online vocabulary games can encourage students to think more broadly about search terms while leading into a discussion about using a thesaurus. A creative addition to the Cephalonian Method could include the use audience response technology, sometimes called “clickers.”

## FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Conteh-Morgan (2002) makes a strong argument that librarians should avoid summative assessment techniques in the classroom. Summative evaluations, although valuable in traditional teaching settings, can distract from the often limited and valuable time librarians have with their constituencies. In most cases, summative assessment is used at the end of a learning period in order to gauge learning for grading purposes. A more effective technique for ESL learners would be to implement classroom assessment strategies that can provide ongoing and immediate feedback (Conteh-Morgan, 2002). The Reference Library has implemented a three-prong approach to assessment for the ESL sessions including pre-class, in-class and post-class assessment activities in an effort to effectively adapt to evolving student learning needs.

The learning goals for ESL sessions include setting the stage for a successful academic experience, putting a friendly face on the library and the services it provides, and providing an introduction to the culture of American libraries. These goals are the foundation for the assessment activities.

For the pre-class assessment, students are sent links to a series of self-paced training modules (Baron & Strout-Dapaz, 2001) that cover the basics of library circulation policies and an introduction to locating scholarly information. These videos are brief, an average of four minutes in length, are not meant to be prescriptive and are close-captioned. The videos complement the traditional library tour that is provided in several languages at the start of each semester through the University Library’s orientation program. Instructional videos meet several learning styles because students can listen, read and watch the videos at their own pace. In order to gauge the level of participation, an assessment survey of four questions was built in at the end of the video series. The videos also prepare students to think about what will be presented during the session and begin to formulate questions.

In-class assessment is performed through informal classroom observation. It is important to note that it is especially important in an ESL learning environment for the teacher to be flexible when confusion arises. Correcting misconceptions at the point in which they arise will help reinforce learning points. For example, as students are working in pairs on a mini-assignment, the librarian can walk around the room listening and watching to how the students perform the task (Conteh-Morgan, 2002). This provides the librarian with the opportunity to correct or clarify concepts immediately while the information is fresh and relevant.

Using a version of the one-minute paper (Angelo & Cross, 1993), post-class assessment is tied to the library session while providing an opportunity for individual relationship building. Students are asked to open their email and send a message answering the question, “What is one question you still have about the library?” The questions sent by the students help in long range planning for the following semester as well as to build an immediate relationship with the librarian beyond the one-shot session. The questions are stripped of personal information, compiled, answered and sent to the entire class in the recognition that if one person has a question, many others in the session may as well. It also provides the additional opportunity to market library services to the students, such as drop-in workshops and Ask-a-Librarian services.

## CONCLUSION

International students enter American universities with varying levels of library experience and knowledge, exemplifying a great number and variety of challenges in the academy. By incorporating a pedagogical strategy including a variety of learning styles and active learning into library instruction sessions, librarians can encourage international students to return to the library throughout their academic careers.

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