

“HOW DID WE DO?”: EVALUATING THE INSTRUCTION PROGRAM WITH A SENIOR SURVEY

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The information literacy instruction program at the DePaul University Libraries has been in place for more than a decade. The full support of the first year writing program contributes to a solid foundation for our introductory level instruction with all sections of a required composition class participating each quarter. The instruction program also includes more advanced discipline-specific instruction that is geared to infusing information literacy across the curriculum. Distribution is dependent upon the specific discipline and whether its curriculum includes a research-based course required for the major that we can target for instruction or some other research component requiring the use of library resources.

While we collect data about which courses we have reached and when, we have little information that indicates the actual impact of the instruction. We are able to assess particular skills that are included in an online workshop created for the basic level instruction courses because it is graded, but assessment of the instruction program itself has proved more challenging. In its strategic plan, the university has set out a number of goals relating to the rigor of the curriculum in general as well as to more specific objectives regarding the information literacy of its graduates. As we do not have an exit assessment of those skills, the library cannot directly assess the impact of the instruction program in terms of student learning. What we realized we could do, however, is survey seniors about their

perceptions of the library instruction they had received while at DePaul, what they remembered about it, and how confident they were in the specific skills covered in our basic-level instruction. The survey went to all sections of the Senior Capstone course offered each spring in each of the colleges over a period of five years (with four years of actual data as one interim year was skipped due to the prioritizing of another project).

While there is much discussion in the literature about the measurement and assessment of the long- and short-term impact of library instruction on student learning, there is not as much research discussing students' self-perception of their competence and confidence with research or the impact of library instruction on those perceptions.

Learning can be said to occur when items move from the short-term memory to long-term memory. We've memorized or learned something we can recall at a later date. (Martinez, 2010 p.63). While students may not be able to recall exactly what they learned during a library instruction session, knowing that they remember having instruction and feel more confident about their skills is still useful information.

Librarian Marian Regalado (2003), in her article “Competence, Confidence and Connections,” notes that learners who are successful in applying the skills they learn in library instruction do become more confident and, “with a sense of confidence that they could tackle research, these students came back to the library and continued to build on their knowledge base of how to use the library effectively.” (p. 93) In other words, becoming more confident in their skills may cause them to be more likely to ask for help when they need it. However, we certainly agree with Geffert and Bruce's (1997) article, “Whither BI? Assessing student perceptions of research skills,” in that we don't necessarily question *if* students are confident,

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but rather whether they *should* feel confident about their skills. (p. 415) Confidence in how to use a particular resource may even result in students using the wrong tool for the job simply because they are more comfortable with it.

DATA CODING AND ANALYSIS

The major discovery in the first year of administering the Senior Capstone Survey (see Appendix) was about the survey itself; it had to do with building the appropriate questions to clarify the data collected. In order to determine how many of the students had basic library instruction at DePaul, we had asked whether they took the specific targeted course -- ENG 104, later renamed Writing, Rhetoric & Discourse (WRD) 104. What we neglected to ask was in what year they had started at DePaul. This was critical in order to effectively analyze the results, as approximately 25% of our students transfer to the university as sophomores or juniors. Transfer students likely would have taken an equivalent course during their first two years at their previous institution, missing the instruction opportunity at DePaul. In addition, students in the Honors Program have their own curriculum and do not take this course, so that was important information to collect as well. We also discovered that students do not distinguish between “library instruction” provided by a librarian and any orientation to or information about the library that their professor may have included in the course. We reworded that question to clarify that we were only interested in the library’s instruction program, (although this lack of distinction continues to be a point to consider and one that could be a useful conversation with faculty).

After revising the survey to collect more demographic data, we decided to include additional questions that would help us to learn more about the library services and/or resources of which students were most aware or that they felt were most important. That information could then be used to adjust instructional content, improve services, and create promotional materials to address any perceived deficits in awareness of support the library can provide for information literacy.

We used NVivo (qualitative data analysis software) to code the responses and matched the demographic data with other answers, such as the courses in which students recalled having had library instruction. We created tags (“free nodes”) based upon recurring themes in the free text responses and then constructed queries to answer questions that we had planned to ask of the data as well as some that surfaced as we reviewed the responses, such as:

Skills Confidence Level

- Was there a correlation between a student’s confidence level in the basic skills and the library instruction received (or recalled)?
- Are the scores higher for students who took WRD 104?
- Are scores higher for particular majors/disciplines?
- Are there particular skills that are consistently rated

lower in the confidence scale?

Student Recall

- What percentage of students remember having library instruction (in any course)?
- How many students couldn’t remember if they had library instruction besides WRD 104?
- How many remembered having instruction but not in which course?
- Do some disciplines have sufficiently targeted instruction that students DO remember the specific courses?

RESULTS

Table 1: Recall of Instruction

Year	Total Students	Took 104	Had 104 instruction	Don't Remember or No (104) Instruction	Had Other instruction	No - Other Inst. (%)	Don't Remember or Blank
2006	372	57%	N/A	N/A	42%	56%	1%*
2007	435	71%	85%	13%	35%	42%	23%
2008	381	70%	84%	14%	30%	40%	30%
2010	304	64%	83%	13%	28%	45%	25%

* Blank only (No “don’t remember” option in 2006 survey)

Details on Table 1:

- Students taking required course (doesn’t include transfers and Honors) range from 57-71%
- Of those students, 83-85% recalled library instruction in 104
- 13-14% either said they didn’t have it or couldn’t remember

Table 2: Was the 104 Instruction Useful?

Year	Very Useful	Somewhat Useful	Not Very Useful	Don't Remember or Blank**
2006	18%	27%	8%	45%
2007	25%	23%	8%	44%
2008	24%	27%	8%	41%
2010	21%	24%	9%	46%

** “Blank” would include anyone who hadn’t taken 104 (transfer/honors students)

IMPLICATIONS OF RESULTS

One insight we gained from this survey is that students do not necessarily remember who taught them about the library. This reinforces the need to coordinate with classroom instructors whenever possible and to look for any opportunities to raise faculty awareness of current resources and services. When students do recall having had instruction, we can try to determine whether it is the content of the instruction in a particular course or the redundancy of instruction if they have had more than one instruction experience that has made it memorable.

MOVING FORWARD

The longitudinal data from several iterations of the survey provides information that will be used to analyze the distribution of instruction and to help us focus our attention on disciplines that may as yet be underserved. It will also help us to see where we may be missing students who transfer to the university and whether that is more prevalent in particular colleges. This is all very useful in fine-tuning our instruction program. It will be interesting to use the survey again in a few years so that we can compare results and strategize for the future.

REFERENCES

- Geffert, B., Bruce, R. (1997). Whither BI? Assessing perceptions of research skills over an undergraduate career. *Reference and User Services Quarterly*, 36(3), 409-417.
- Martinez, M.E. (2010). Human memory: the basics. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 91(8), 62-65.
- Regalado, M. (2003). Competence, confidence, and connections: aiding the transition to college. *College & Undergraduate Libraries*, 10(2), 89-97.

APPENDIX
Senior Capstone Library Instruction Survey
(2006)

[NOTE: White space has been reduced for inclusion in this document]

1. Did you have library instruction as part of English 104?

Yes	No	Didn't take ENG 104
	(Skip to Question 3)	(Skip to Question 3)

2. How useful have you found what you learned about library research in English 104?
 (Circle your answer.)

1	2	3	4
Don't remember anything	Not very useful	Somewhat useful (used in English but nowhere else)	Very Useful (used in several courses)

3. Have you had library instruction in any other classes?

No Yes
 If yes, list

Course	Year (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior)	Course	Year (Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior)
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

4. On a scale from one to five, assess your level of confidence in the following: (Circle your answer.)
 Less confident More confident

Using the library catalog to find books and other materials

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Online search strategies (developing keywords and search statements)

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Online databases: selecting appropriate databases and searching for articles

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Locating full text articles online

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Locating articles and books within the Library

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Evaluating Internet resources

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

5. What has been your greatest research-related challenge up to now?

6. How can the library help you to be successful in your senior capstone course?

Senior Capstone Library Instruction Survey

(Revised)

1. When did you start at DePaul?

Freshman

Transferred from another school as a Sophomore Junior or Senior

2. Are/Were you in the Honors Program?

Yes No

3. Did you take English 104 or Writing Rhetoric & Discourse 104?

Yes, as a Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

No (Skip to Question 6)

4. In your ENG/WRD 104 class, did a librarian provide instruction for your class about library research (either in the library or in your classroom)?

Yes No

5. How useful have you found what you learned about library research in ENG 104 or WRD 104?

(Circle your answer.)

1

2

3

4

Don't
remember
anything

Not very
useful

Somewhat useful
(used in English but
nowhere else)

Very Useful
(used in several courses)

6. Have you had any other library instruction (online workshop or presentation by a librarian) in other classes?

Yes (list below)

No Don't remember

Course

Year

(Fresh., Soph., Jr., Sr.)

Course

Year

(Fresh., Soph., Jr., Sr.)

7. On a scale from one to five, assess your level of confidence in the following:
(Circle your answer.)

Less confident  More confident

Using the library catalog to find books and other materials

1 2 3 4 5

Online search strategies (developing keywords and search statements)

1 2 3 4 5

Online databases: selecting appropriate databases and searching for articles

1 2 3 4 5

Locating full text articles online

1 2 3 4 5

Locating articles and books within the Library

1 2 3 4 5

Evaluating Internet resources

1 2 3 4 5

8. What has been your greatest research-related challenge up to now?

9. What services or assistance from the library have you found most useful in completing your research project(s)?

10. What other service(s) would you suggest that the library offer to help students to be successful in their courses?

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