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AN EMBEDDED LIBRARIAN: WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, AND HOW WELL?

HEATHER JAMES

BACKGROUND

At Marquette University, English 1001: Rhetoric and Composition I (RC1) is a required course for those students who do not test out or enroll in the Honors Program. So it's extremely helpful that the Libraries' Research & Instruction Department (RIS) has a strong partnership with the RC program, and library instruction is a required component of every RC1 class.

In the Fall 2012 semester, Victoria Browne was a Master's Degree student instructing RC1, looking to expand her approach to the curriculum. We began to talk about the possibility of initiating an embedded librarian partnership. Since this type of collaboration had not been done at Marquette, we attempted to assess the impact of having an embedded librarian in the course as compared with an identical course having only the standard "one-shot" contact with a librarian.

CURRICULUM

The basic curriculum of the RC1 course is pre-determined by the English Department's faculty coordinator. It includes four units—Rhetorical Analysis, Academic Exposition, Academic Argument, and Narrative Literacy—with four essays making up the bulk of students' grades. Within these units, individual instructors have the autonomy to determine the lessons and smaller writing assignments. Browne designed her curriculum to be the same for both sections. Then we talked about where I thought there could be a useful addition of information literacy instruction at various points, and she re-worked the lesson calendar for the embedded section as needed. We tried to keep every aspect of the courses the same apart from the additions of the embedded librarian. The two sections were even offered at consecutive times, by coincidence.

The standard library component of RC1 comes during Unit 2 - Academic Exposition - when students are first asked to research and use outside sources in their essays. This standard instruction is outlined, prepared, and softly scripted by a subset of RIS librarians. They create a course specific LibGuide, prep sample searches and example articles, and create digital worksheets and an assessment survey. In this way, any of the 12 RIS librarians can teach an RC1 class, and the content is consistent. The worksheets capture students' answers, so they are submitted to the instructors at the end of each class, when there is time for them to be completed. The assessment survey is used for RIS purposes. The results are aggregated and discussed among the librarians at the conclusion of the unit every year. They inform changes for the following year.

For Browne's classes, we engineered the schedule so that I delivered these sessions to both of her sections. For the regular section, this was the only point in the semester when they met me. For the embedded section my interactions with the class went as follows:

Unit One:

During the Rhetorical Analysis unit the goal is to have students determine the (in)effective rhetorical strategies of an author and then to discuss and analyze them. There is no requirement for sources beyond class readings, so we determined that I would have mainly introductory interactions. I met the class on the first day, and Browne included all of my contact information

on the syllabus and course calendars so that the students could see that I was going to be an integral part of their semester. Later in the unit, I returned to lead a short discussion that took about 25 minutes. I called the discussion, “What is Information Literacy?” and prefaced it with content in their Desire2Learn (D2L) course page: Penn State Library’s (Cheney & Bichel, 2004) “The Information Cycle” and from Coastal Carolina University’s Kimbel Library (Vossler, Watts, & Hodge, 2011) “Why Citation Is Important.” During the discussion, we talked about the concepts of information overload, evaluation, and how librarians play a role in organizing and then navigating sources.

Unit Two:

The Academic Exposition unit requires students write an expository essay on a global health issue or pop culture phenomenon using outside sources, one of which must be a peer-reviewed publication and one from a non-US publication. Browne and I saw this unit as the one with the most extensive needs. We used the general library session as an introduction to the content, and I led the session following the same outline as the rest of the RIS librarians. I did work with my colleagues to engineer that the session was scheduled early on in the unit, when Browne preferred, rather than randomly scheduled like the rest of the sections. At the end of the session I had the students complete the digital worksheets and send them to me for preview; I did not have the students complete the assessment survey at this time. For homework the students had to participate in a D2L discussion board about their potential topics and sources; I participated in this board with guidance about the breadth or narrowness of their topics. They also had to watch a whiteboard video that I created about the process of researching for an expository essay.

The video, a digital learning object, was created using VideoScribe with the help of the RIS Instructional Designer. It addressed the concept of how to approach research given a topic in which the student is likely to not be an expert. The video is approximately three minutes long and draws the analogy of different types of sources being like different types of maps when a person is new to an area. The video makes an argument for using reference sources rather than jumping to peer-reviewed publications when first dealing with a new area of research, but the main goal is to clarify the scope and purpose of the three types of sources most commonly used for this unit’s essay—reference, news, and scholarly publications.

At the next class, I led a discussion about the results of the students’ worksheets and discussion board posts in order to get a sense of their comfort level and questions about the research process. We discussed their response to the whiteboard video and tied the process of research to the content they had been discussing in class about evaluating and critiquing sources. I loaded additional video content, again from Kimbel Library (Vossler, Watts, & Hodge, 2011), into their D2L page: “Scholarly Sources vs. Popular Sources,” “What is a Scholarly Article,” and “Selecting the Right Number of Key Words.” During the following week I responded via D2L to another short assignment in which they identified their final topic and one of their potential sources. I offered searching tips and guidance to each student. I joined the class again to observe the discussion of model essays in order to have a consistent understanding of what Browne was looking for, and then I made myself available for individual research consultations during the final week of the unit. Three of the students made appointments with me.

Unit Three:

The Academic Argument unit asks students to argue a specific proposal for a local social issue (gang violence, at-risk youth, etc.) in the form of a traditional academic research paper. Although the library is not usually involved in this unit, Browne and I agreed that the research requirements of this unit made my participation logical. We started the unit by having students do a short writing assignment that addressed their experience researching for the Unit 2 essay and their goals and expectations for research in this unit. During the second class session, students returned to the library computer lab to do an activity with another digital learning object that I created.

The idea of this learning object, which we called “The Party,” was to introduce students to a new perspective when approaching their research for the purposes of writing an argument. I wanted to address common pitfalls such as cherry-picking sources or using sources that are not “in conversation.” This activity asked students to put together an invite list for a small dinner party after they’d read the profiles of potential guests. The activity was loaded into the D2L course page with a SCORM data package so that once they completed it, I could see which were the most common sets of characters chosen. I used this to start class discussion about how the students expected that these characters would interact and what discussion would develop during this party. What would be the points of contention or agreement? If a certain topic were likely to come up, who would have the most expertise on it? I wrapped up discussion by linking the analogy back to text sources. We looked at the abstracts of a results list in a database to assess which sources were more likely to be “in conversation” with each other, which had high levels of expertise, and how even though two sources might be on the same general topic they might actually have very little in common. This took a full 50-minute class period.

Later in the unit I visited the class to observe the discussion of proposing a solution and supporting claims with evidence. I again responded to their short writing assignment detailing their final topic selection, their main claims, and their likely sources.

Unit Four:

The Academic Interpretation unit has students analyze the textual, cultural and ethical elements of a narrative; no outside research is required. I joined the class one time, mostly for the benefit of our relationship rather than a research need. In the final week of the semester, I returned one last time to say goodbye and to ask students to complete the assessment survey—the same survey all students completed at the end of their library instruction in Unit 2, with the addition of a few open-ended response questions on the embedded librarian relationship.

ASSESSMENT

This project was cleared as IRB exempt through the Office of Research Compliance. Throughout the semester, multiple methods of assessment were implemented in both sections. The first method involved modifying the sample grading rubrics from the RC program by adding specific language around the use of outside sources in students' essays. Browne shared these rubrics with the students during the final week of each unit; she then kept a separate log for each student indicating how she evaluated their essays in this one particular category. Logs of the first three essays for both sections were compared as a measure of the instructor's satisfaction with the students' final output.

Additionally, for quantitative assessment, we compared the results of the survey that was designed by RIS librarians. The students in the embedded section completed this survey at the end of the semester, where most students completed it at the end of their library instruction session. The results of the embedded section were compared with the aggregated results of the rest of the RC1 students for the semester, including Browne's standard section. The survey included content knowledge questions on using Boolean operators and refining results sets as well as affective outcomes like confidence in research ability.

Finally, the last quantitative measure involved developing a rubric with which to conduct a citation analysis of students' final essays for Unit 3. The rubric was inspired by the work of the Citation Project (2012) and the research of Oakleaf (2014). This project took a much closer look at students' use of references than instructors usually can, under the time constraints of grading and returning essays within the semester. Over the course of six months, a handful of volunteer RIS librarians read students' essays from both sections, along with their sources, and coded the usage according to the developed rubric.

Qualitative assessment was done primarily in the embedded section: the first assignment of Unit 3, a reflection on the research process, offered insights into students' affective outcomes. There were also open ended questions added to the end of the survey to give feedback on the embedded librarian partnership.

The findings of the assessment did not show dramatic differences. For the rubrics kept by Browne, the embedded section showed an average improvement from 2.06 to 2.50 on a 0-3 scale. The standard section averaged improvement from 1.90 to 2.35.

Figure 1: IL Rubrics Embedded Section

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Figure 2: IL Rubrics Standard Section

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The results of the RIS survey showed that the embedded section had a higher percentage of students answer the content knowledge questions correctly on 5 of 6 questions as compared with the aggregate student data from the one-shot sessions, and 94.7% of students in the embedded section answered positively on the confidence in research ability question as compared with 84.8% of the rest of RC1 students.

Figure 3: Survey Results

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The citation analysis was extremely interesting for the RIS librarians who participated, but the results were inconclusive. The embedded section showed slightly higher quality and more relevant sources in their papers, but the standard section showed slightly higher levels of usage and correct citation procedures. In both cases the differences are extremely slight, and the sample size is much too small to be significant - 20 students in each section.

Figure 4: Citation Analysis Results

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The qualitative data collected from the embedded section showed 100% satisfaction with having an embedded librarian, both in the reflections and in the additional survey questions.

CONCLUSION

While these results don't offer much for significant data, and there are plenty of potential explanations that could be applied to them, this pilot was extremely successful in raising awareness of the potential of this level of partnership between instructors and librarians, both in RIS and in the English department. As a direct result of this collaboration with Browne, I was approached by two other instructors to develop an embedded partnership with their classes for Fall 2013. Additionally, the RIS collaboration with the RC program transformed for Fall 2013 to be more akin to an embedded relationship. The "Integrated Librarian" program at Marquette, matched librarians to specific instructors of RC1 for the semester and encouraged instructors and students to think of their librarian as their go-to person for any questions throughout the semester. Finally, as a result of the enthusiasm for the digital learning objects created during this pilot, the RIS librarian responsible for coordinating the RC partnership worked with the Instructional Designer to develop a more comprehensive digital learning object that includes the whiteboard video along with a recorded database demo and an interactive worksheet. Finally, this pilot has offered opportunity to rethink the way we assess our impact with students. Particularly, the citation analysis rubric gave librarians a glimpse of what students actually do with the information we give them during Information Literacy instruction. These insights are currently spurring conversation within RIS and with the English department about how to better evaluate and reinforce students' use of sources. Additionally, the sharing of this pilot with RIS librarians has inspired a few others to approach faculty in their liaison departments with ideas for deeper partnerships in instruction, including embedded partnerships and creation of course-specific digital learning objects.

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APPENDIX A

Citation Analysis Rubric and Coding Key

Section	Student						
		Source	Number of times used	Quality	Citation	Usage	Relevance
		1					
		2					
		[3]					

Coding Definitions:

Quality

- 4 – Scholarly, reviewed publication
- 3 – Subject-specific popular source, Popular credible source, Government/NGO source, Organization/company credible information
- [2 – Not an option]
- 1 – Questionable credibility, Publisher unverified in source, Vanity publication
- 0 – Erroneous, Not factual information presented as fact

Citation – “**form**” refers to the font and punctuation and spacing issues of the MLA citation style; “**complete information**” refers to all necessary and MLA prescribed publication information needed in order to relocate the source.

MLA Works cited lists do not need full url’s for web sources.

- 4 – Source cited with complete information at all uses in-text and in Works Cited with accurate form for both in-text and Works Cited
- 3 – Source cited with complete information at all uses but inaccurate form in Works Cited OR in-text
- 2 – Source not cited at all uses or without complete information in-text (e.g. direct quote missing page number or content from source included but not cited parenthetically) BUT complete information included in Works Cited; may have inaccurate form in Works Cited
- 1 – Incomplete information for source in Works Cited
- 0 – Source not included in Works Cited or not cited in-text; content has been verified as being from an un-cited source

Usage – for a single source used more than once and in multiple ways record only the highest score applicable

- 4 – Summary: shows engagement and comprehension of an extended chunk of or an entire text
- 3 – Paraphrase: shows engagement and comprehension of a small chunk of text (sentence to paragraph in length)
- 2 – Quote: shows identification and inclusion of a useful piece of information
- 1 – Patchwriting: Restates ideas or content of source with only minor changes to language or syntax of original
- 0 – Plagiarism: uses content, ideas, language, or rhetoric of a source without crediting (e.g. direct quote missing quotation marks)

Relevance – “**thesis**” refers to the student’s individual argument; “**topic**” refers to the overall subject of the essay but is broader than the student’s individual argument; **in determining relevance** currency of information, typicality or comparability of population or geography or context, and source’s purpose or focus or bias may bear consideration depending upon the student’s thesis

- 4 – Specifically relevant to student’s thesis
- 3 – Generally relevant to student’s topic
- [2 – Not an option]
- 1 – Tangentially relevant to student’s topic
- 0 – Irrelevant to the student’s topic

Images for Tables and Figures (Editor will put in body of the text later)

Figure 1 IL Rubrics Embedded Section

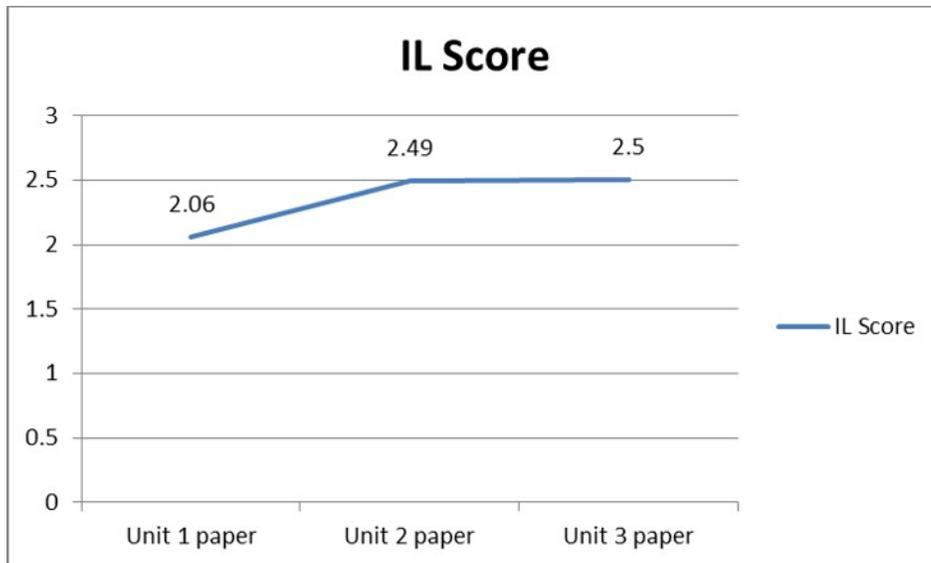


Figure 2 IL Rubrics Standard Section

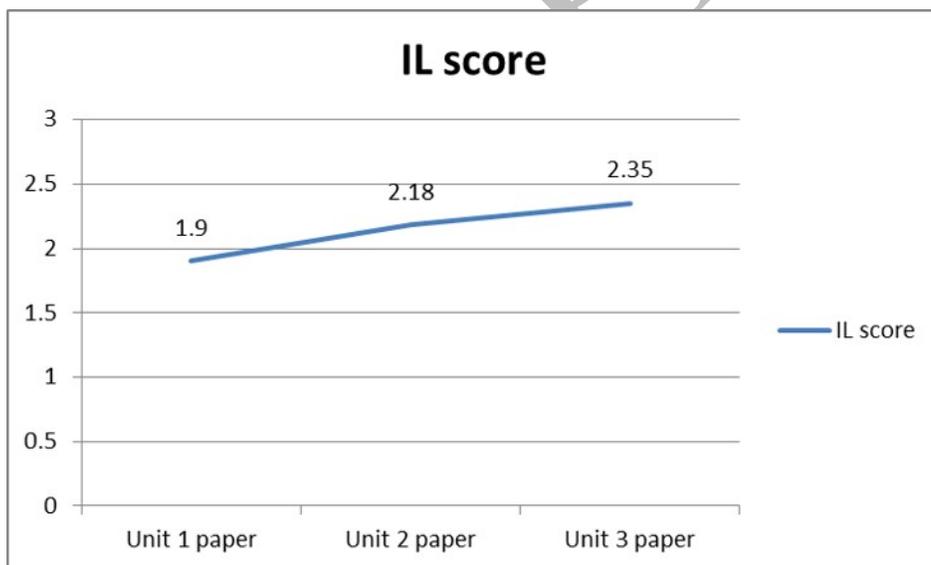


Figure 3 Survey Results

Question	% correct	% all students
1	100	95.6
2	84.2	54.9
3	94.7	89
4	68.4	72.2
5	100	83.5
6	94.7	71.3
[7]	[94.7]	84.8
[8]	[94.7]	

Figure 4 Citation Analysis Results

Section Averages				
	Quality	Citation	Usage	Relevance
Embedded	2.9	2.3	2.2	3.4
Not Embedded	2.8	2.4	2.5	3.1