

# REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE: REVAMPING A FRESHMAN SEMINAR INFORMATION LITERACY PROGRAM

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## INTRODUCTION

In any college or university library, the catalog is an essential tool. Whether it's the card catalog of the past or the OPAC of today, for decades, students have needed to have some familiarity with it to find books. According to a 2006 study, 95% of first year library instruction programs include information about the catalog (Boyd-Byrnes & McDermott, 2006). In the years since the OPAC's development, however, many other tools have become essential. Given the same 50-minute session, no new technology, no new staff, a standard office photocopier, and without abandoning the original essential tool, how is it possible to revise and update a library orientation program for 2000+ freshmen?

## THE RAW MATERIALS

The University of Rhode Island's First Year Experience Program, URI 101, was started in 1995. The original Library session included a tour of the library, a demonstration and discussion of the library catalog, a brief discussion of LC call numbers, and an opportunity for students to try searching the catalog for a book on a topic of their choice; the students recorded their choice and relevant bibliographic information on a worksheet. At the end of the session, students submitted the worksheet to the library instructor, who would correct the worksheet and return it to the URI 101 instructor.

While the session did meet the goals of introducing students to the library, it was designed at a point when the catalog was still new, and other research tools were not freely or readily available. Changes in the digital and academic environment meant it was time for a change. In addition, many of the URI 101

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student mentors felt that the session was too inflexible, and that they could teach it better themselves.

## USING AND RENEWING OUR RESOURCES

Two departmental changes aided the start of this process: the appointment of a Head of Instruction and a Reference and Instructional Design Librarian.

Shortly thereafter, the Head of Instruction was approached by the head of student mentors from the URI 101 program. The mentors' leader was interested in starting a dialog to create a URI 101 session that would highlight the value of the University Library, and evolve into a program that would include more active learning.

Two models of instructional design provided the foundation for creating the new session, starting with Debra Gilchrist's Five Questions for Assessment (Gilchrist, 2007). This includes asking a series of questions about the instruction to be planned:

1. **Outcome:** What do you want the student to be able to do?
2. **IL Curriculum:** What does the student need to know in order to do this well?
3. **Pedagogy:** What activity will facilitate the learning?
4. **Assessment:** How will the student demonstrate the learning?
5. **Criteria for Evaluation:** How will I know the student has done this well?

The authors also drew on a model based on backward

design principles, from *Making the Most of Understanding by Design* (Brown, 2004, p. 17):

The best instructional designs are backward; that is they begin with desired results, rather than with instructional activities... [involving] three inter-related stages:

1. Identifying desired results (such as enduring understandings, essential questions, and enabling knowledge objectives).
2. Determining acceptable evidence to assess and to evaluate student achievement of desired results.
3. Designing learning activities to promote all students' mastery of desired results and their subsequent success on identified assessment tasks.

Using Gilchrist's Five Questions as a base, the Head of Instruction wanted to determine what the URI 101 mentors wanted the students to know at the end of the session, and what visions they had for the session. The student mentor representative envisioned a pre-activity to introduce students to research, a more student-centered session, and brought along a sample scavenger hunt that some sections of the course used as a substitute for the library session.

The same questions were used to determine what the authors and their colleagues wanted the students to know.

## COLLABORATION

To make the collaboration process easier, the authors learned and adopted the mentors' jargon. For example, the mentors' plans for each URI 101 session (not just the Library's session) included pre- and post-activities, so these terms were used to describe the elements of the plan. The authors also saw a need to try to align their expectations with those of the mentors. Finally, the authors felt it was important to listen to the mentors' ideas about students and the library, and not wholly impose their own priorities and needs on the session.

## NEW PLAN

Certain elements of the existing program were worth recycling into the program being planned. The format was easy to deliver with minimal preparation, reached a large number of students, and allowed both busy librarians and graduate student trainees to deliver the content. The in-person session also provided an opportunity for instructors to address questions as they arose, and generated good public relations for the library.

The authors decided to reduce some of the elements that no longer required emphasis, to re-use some extant materials from the Library's URI 101 session, and to recycle elements that worked in other instruction sessions. This led to a three-part plan involving a pre-activity, an in-class activity, and a post-activity.

The previously passive tour, catalog demonstration, and individual worksheet were transformed into an interactive format, using questions that were based on discovery and discussion. The new in-class session emphasized investigation of answers to questions about library services and resources, and the questions were formulated to show students how to find answers rather than simply telling them. In addition, the authors created a flexible framework that made it easy to use subject-specific examples to lead students toward tools that relate to their major.

## Pre-Activity

Shortly before the students' visit to the Library, they would complete the Library Experience Pre-Activity and bring their results to the class. This exercise was designed to address the mentors' concern that students in URI 101 understand that the open web was not the best source of information for college-level research, although it may have been what they used in high school. Students were asked to think about their own use of the web for research, and to find materials that they thought might be suitable for college level research. As first-semester students, they most likely would not have had to do any college-level research at this point, nor would they have had instruction in other classes on how to locate appropriate materials. This activity was based on an in-class worksheet devised by another librarian who had used it to introduce Internet evaluation.

## In-Class Activity

When the class arrived, students would take a short tour of the main level of the library, and receive a map with the names of main service points left blank. During the tour, students would fill in the names of the service points. In the classroom, students would work in pairs to explore the Library's web site to complete a worksheet with questions ranging from using Library services to subtle etiquette hints. Students would also use the catalog to locate a book, noting specific information such as the subject headings, the call number, and its availability.

This hands-on portion included introductory short answer, multiple choice, and fill-in-the-blank questions. Some were intended to spur discussion among the students, while others provided talking points for the instructor, which he or she could use as time permitted. This would allow flexibility for those who wanted to spend more time on call numbers to do so, while others could reinforce the use of subject headings if they so desired. At key points, the library instructor would break up the flow of the class by addressing particular questions on the worksheet, and at the end of the session, the Library instructor would discuss the students' pre-activity results.

The map, tour, and in-class activity were based on one designed by a graduate student intern who had created it for another course taught by the library.

### Post-Activity: Information Excavation

Finally, to reinforce what they'd seen and learned in the class, the students would complete the Information Excavation Scavenger Hunt after the session. The URI 101 mentors specifically requested a scavenger hunt to push students into the library and require them to seek answers to library-related topics.

Ample literature and opinion have covered the issues of using scavenger hunts in library orientations and information literacy classes, and perceptions have been mostly negative (McCain, 2007). The authors and their colleagues had also previously expressed dismay at library-related scavenger hunts, but this provided the opportunity for the authors to create something that would be more appropriate for the students, and relevant to their majors or future careers. To avoid creating an unnecessary strain on the Reference and Circulation desks, the answers to sixteen of the eighteen questions on the Information Excavation could be found on the Library's web site or through a simple search of the Library's catalog. The two remaining questions asked students to find the location of a copy card vending machine near the entrance to the Library and to browse the shelves under a specific call number in the Current Periodicals section.

Five of the questions were tailored to the actual or prospective majors of the students in each section. For example, students would be steered toward Library sections that would contain materials relevant to their major, and locate databases and user guides related to their topics.

### ALIGNING GOALS AND OUTCOMES WITH INFORMATION LITERACY STANDARDS

The Library Experience only dips a toe in the water of the ACRL IL Competency Standards. URI 101 does not have a research component; however, the Library Experience does provide students with a brief introduction to IL Standards 2 and 3.

**Standard 2** - The information literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.

Performance Indicator 1c - Investigates the scope, content, and organization of information retrieval systems.

**Standard 3** - The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.

Performance Indicator 2a-d - The information literate student articulates and applies initial criteria for evaluating both the information and its sources.

Outcomes Include: (see below)

1. Examines and compares information from various sources in order to evaluate reliability, validity, accuracy, authority, timeliness, and point of view or bias
2. Analyzes the structure and logic of supporting arguments or methods
3. Recognizes prejudice, deception, or manipulation
4. Recognizes the cultural, physical, or other context within which the information was created and understands the impact of context on interpreting the information

### ASSESSMENT AND RESULTS

To answer the question, "How will I know the students have done this well?" a simple assessment asked students:

- Name three things you learned.
- Name two things you're unclear about.
- Describe one thing you'll do differently when researching in the future.

The students' comments provided evidence that the goals and outcomes for the session were satisfied. Students noted that they learned where to get assistance when needed, how to use the library's catalog, and were impressed by the variety of resources available beyond Google.

URI 101 mentors, many of whom had attended a Library session as it had been taught for 10 years were positive about the changes: "We liked it," "Very helpful," and "Informative," were among the comments. URI 101 Instructors were also enthusiastic. "300% better than before!" noted one professor. Librarians also appreciated the flexibility of the sessions and the ability to highlight features as needed through discussion.

Once the sessions had ended, a total of 108 sections with 2259 students came to the URI 101 Library Experience session. This was 21 more sections than the previous year, reaching 406 more students. In prior years, there were numerous cancellations and no-shows, but in 2007, there were almost no cancellations, and only two no-shows. Overall, library instructors, URI 101 instructors, and URI 101 mentors noted that the students were more engaged.

Surprisingly, few sections did the pre-activity, and no one did the post-activity, even though these were specifically requested by the URI 101 mentors. Although these materials were posted on the Library's web site and linked from the mentor resources page, mentors and instructors either weren't aware

of the pages or chose not to use the activities. Because the pre-activity and post-activity were created so that they could work as stand-alone activities, this did not have a significant impact on the delivery of in-class content. The exact reasons why these weren't completed are unclear, but further revisions (detailed below) were made after discussion with the URI 101 staff. In the end, the revamp remained successful; instructors and mentors appreciated the change in both the content and delivery, and were more enthusiastic about the sessions, which better met students needs.

## FUTURE OPTIONS

The Library Experience is still a work in progress, but the initial feedback is encouraging. After meeting again with URI 101 staff, the earlier post-activity scavenger hunt has become the new pre-activity, while some parts of the first pre-activity have been incorporated into the in-class session. Student feedback and assessments led to adjustment of the in-class activities to reinforce and ensure the coverage of formalized goals and desired outcomes. For the instructors, more support has been built into the lesson plans, and the previously open-ended assessment forms are being revised to acquire more specific information.

Ultimately, the session as it stands only scratches the surface, and does not incorporate deep learning. Given the time constraints and the possible goals, going further is difficult. Linking class topics to the students' service learning project is one option under consideration.

## CONSIDERATIONS WHEN DOING IT YOURSELF

Whether it's a small revision or a larger scale overhaul of an instruction program, select strategies that help with both planning and assessment of instruction. The two used in this revision were based on backward design principles and Debra Gilchrist's Five Questions for Assessment Design, but other models of instructional design may be useful.

Consider techniques to reduce student apathy and anxiety. Active learning techniques can build self-confidence and lead students to discovery, while highlighting useful resources can reduce student frustration over time. Create flexible opportunities for discussion, so that librarians can get a sense of what the class needs, and respond appropriately. Building in a small amount of extra time will allow the librarian to highlight a service, resource, or concept that might otherwise be neglected in a more scripted session. Tailor activities to subject interests whenever possible. This makes the session more interesting in the short-term, and more relevant in the long-term.

Classrooms and group dynamics may also have an impact on the kinds of changes possible. How are students seated in the room? Is it possible to re-arrange the room to encourage collaboration? For those with fewer computers than students,

encourage collaboration by having two students work at the same computer.

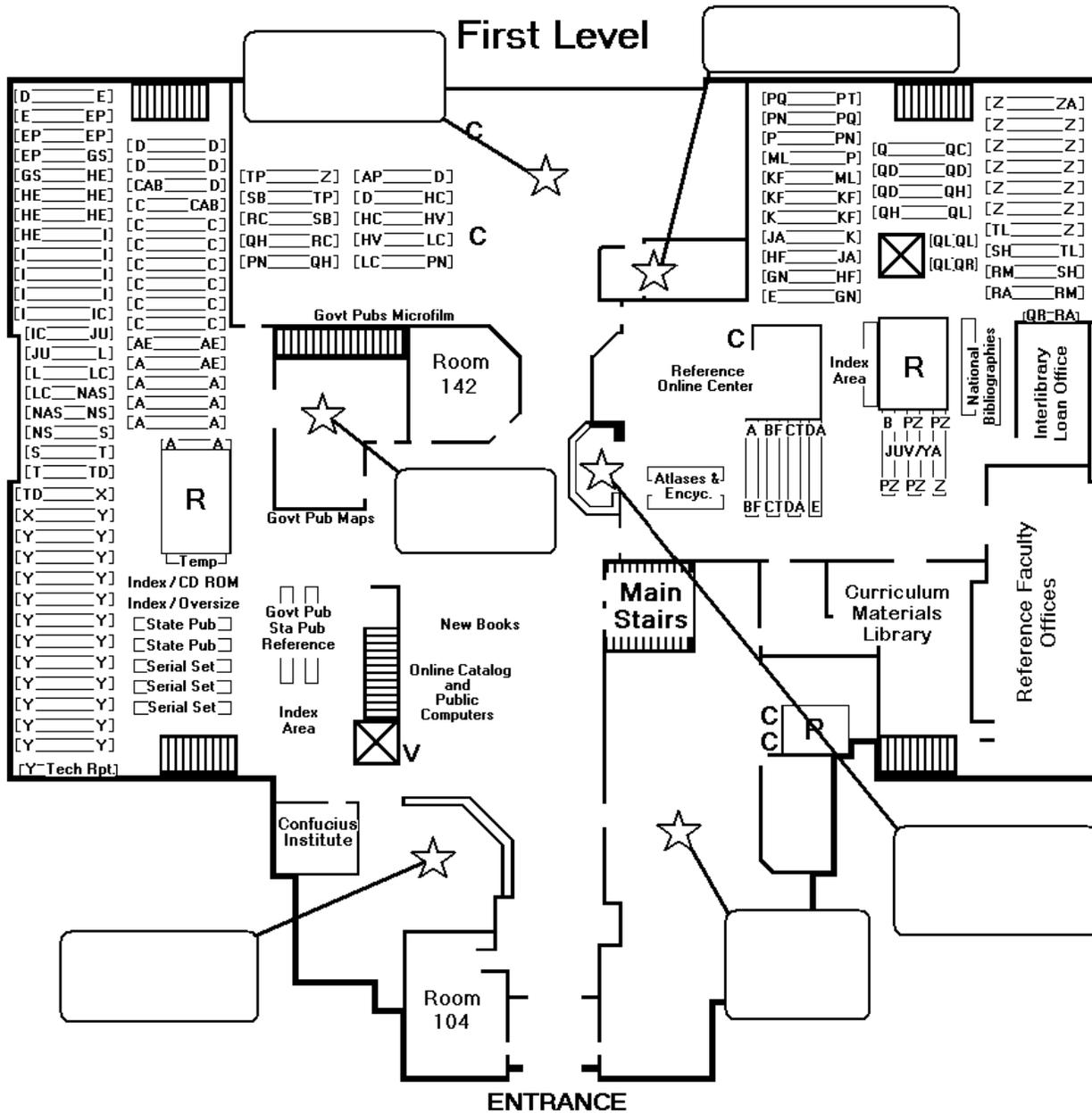
Take into account individual personalities. If using questions to spur discussion, the librarian can't be afraid to be assertive and steer the boat. Thus, create training sessions that provide techniques and hints for those who need it.

Collaborating to revise any instruction session or program will take time. In this case, it took over ten years to achieve a more meaningful dialog with the URI 101 mentors, although both parties wanted to see the students succeed. Expect collaboration to require some compromises. Find common ground, but also keep in mind that the goal is to serve the students, not those delivering the content. Finally, remember that collaboration is not just *coordination* -- find and aim for common goals together.

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# APPENDIX 1: MAP OF LIBRARY



- |           |                                             |                                   |                    |
|-----------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------|
| Elevator  | <b>C</b> Copier                             | Call Numbers for Books:           | A - P Third Floor  |
| Stairway  | <b>V</b> Copy/Printing Card Vending Machine | Reference & Current Periodicals   | Q - Z Second Floor |
| Restrooms |                                             | Serial Stacks / Bound Periodicals | First Floor        |
|           |                                             |                                   | Lower Level        |

## APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE QUESTIONS FROM IN-CLASS SESSION AND INFORMATION EXCAVATION

### From In-Class Session

1. What are at least 3 things you can accomplish with a visit to the Circulation Desk?
2. You need some pointers on where to start your research for your animal science class. Where can you ask a question about that? What are three different ways you could contact this place?
5. In the library, you may do all of the following EXCEPT:
  - a. Reserve a group study room
  - b. Talk loudly on your cell phone
  - c. Watch a movie
  - d. Get research help
  - e. Look at art
6. Think about the URI Library and the libraries that you used before coming to URI. List at least 3 differences that you've noticed so far:

### From the Information Excavation Scavenger Hunt

4. Where is the Galanti Lounge located? What is it used for?
5. Where are books with call numbers starting with the letter **B**?

For the next few questions, start at the Library's Home Page ([www.uri.edu/library](http://www.uri.edu/library)).

14. What is the call number for Exploring the psychology of interest at URI? (Use the HELIN Catalog and search by title for this one.)
16. Again from the Library's Home Page, click on **User Guides**, then **Subject Guides**. Look at the list of topics or go to "All Subject Guides by Title." Pick a Reference book that might help you in a class you're taking. What book did you select, and why might it be useful?