Singing the Praises of IL: The Case of a Required Credit-Bearing IL Music Course

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Introduction

Music 228 is a required, credit-bearing, discipline-specific information literacy (IL) course that began being offered in 2001 at Augustana University College (the Augustana Campus of the University of Alberta as of 2004) in Alberta, Canada. It grew out of initial bibliographic instruction collaborations with music faculty who saw value in traditional "one-shot" library instruction sessions but recognized the need for more substantial library research education for their students.

Background and Context

The majority of students who come to the Augustana Campus to study music are focused on performance and are often frustrated at the prospect of having to do library research. They expect to devote substantial time and effort to instrumental or vocal practice but are much less enthusiastic about devoting time to library research. Whether looking for information for a major term paper or using the library catalogue to locate a piece of music, many students find themselves lost and overwhelmed. To address this situation, prior to 2001, music faculty would request a traditional one-shot library session to give the students an overview of the library. Although well intentioned, these sessions usually resulted in little more than the students knowing the location of the library, getting a brief introduction to relevant music resources and being introduced to the reference librarian. This approach was only marginally helpful except to the most eager students who sensed the key to success was to be

in regular contact with a librarian in order to learn the intricacies of doing library research. Still, this left the majority of students doing substandard library research which caused considerable frustration for faculty upon receiving poorly researched term papers. In an attempt to remedy this situation, the librarians and music faculty discussed the possibility of a semester long course, tailored specifically to music students, that would teach library research skills in more breadth and depth than could be achieved in a single session.

Course Characteristics

The music department was adamant from the beginning that the course be graded (i.e., not offered on a pass/fail basis) and that it be a required for students to graduate with either a Bachelor of Arts in Music or a Bachelor of Music degree. These two characteristics are very significant. Being a graded course gives it more weight in the eyes of students as it is recorded on their academic transcript as equal with other university courses. Insisting on it being a required course is indicative of how essential the music faculty consider the course to be for students' university music education. It also ensures that all music students get a significant IL experience as opposed to the hit and miss of the one-shot approach.

It was also decided that the course should be discipline-specific rather than combining it in a larger fine arts offering which would include drama and art. This was because there are enough unique resources (e.g., sound recordings, scores, discipline-specific databases) in music to warrant a separate course. As well, the discipline-specific approach allows for a more in-depth examination of relevant research tools than does a more generic model.

A key characteristic of the course, in terms of integrating

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IL in a meaningful way, was the co-requisite requirement. The co-requisite is a course in the same discipline, taken in the same semester, which has a major paper requiring significant library research. This means that the assignments in Music 228 are designed to develop the library research skills that students will need to successfully complete their course assignment (usually a term paper) in the other class. The course most often aligned with Music 228 is a music history class. By strategically offering these as "paired" students are able to apply the knowledge and skills they acquire in Music 228 immediately, directly, and practically. I characterize this as teaching "at the time of need" as opposed to teaching "in case of need", the former being much more practical in terms of applying IL knowledge and skills to a real and immediate research need. This approach is appreciated by the students and makes the IL experience more relevant to them.

Lastly, the librarians and music faculty agreed to designate the course for students with at least a second year standing. This was decided because most first year students are being introduced to the discipline and are rarely required to do substantial library research. In a sense, they are not academically mature enough to appreciate or apply more advanced IL skills in their first year.

Course Design

At this point it is worth noting that, at that time, I was also working with the English department on a course that incorporated IL as one-third of a three credit course intended as an introduction to the study of English as a discipline. This course, along with Music 228, provided the structure and inspiration among other disciplines to eventually offer discipline-specific, credit-bearing IL courses in 21 disciplines at Augustana (Goebel & Neff, 2007).

Once it was decided to proceed with the Music 228, I was charged with the responsibility of designing the content. My first step was to do a literature review to determine whether such a discipline-specific, credit-bearing course had been offered elsewhere. I limited my search to the library literature and music education literature. An integrated library instruction program designed for undergraduate music students at Bowling Green State University (Fidler & James, 1993) reported much success. A number of other articles (Maple, Christensen & Abromeit, 1996; Marley, 1998; Troutman, 2000) discussed the need for improved bibliographic instruction strategies for music students. While all of these articles were helpful to me in getting a clearer picture of music library instruction at that time, I discovered no documented credit-bearing IL music course at the undergraduate level.

I consulted with the music faculty to see what elements they would like to see covered in the course. Their suggestions were not so much about what to cover as what outcomes they would like to see. Specifically, they wanted students to know the appropriate resources to consult for doing music research, know the difference between scholarly and non-scholarly resources and how to cite them properly. Up to this point I was intentional about not formally introducing IL to them as a concept because I thought it best to get their perspective, in their own words, on what students were lacking. Once they had articulated their expectations for the course, I shared ACRL's *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2000) with them. While they were receptive to the concept of IL and impressed that there were developed standards they essentially acknowledged that, as the librarian (with a music background), I was in the best position to determine the course content. Fortunately, because of Augustana's culture of mutual respect between discipline faculty and librarians there were no territorial or ego issues that had to be overcome. We shared the same objectives of improving students' ability to conduct effective library research.

The primary components to be covered in the course were as follows:

- the nature of information;
- the web for music research;
- critical thinking in assessing sources;
- library organization, classification and cataloguing;
- music reference resources;
- library catalogues;
- periodical literature and indexes/databases;
- ethical use of information and plagiarism avoidance;
- documentation and use of the *Modern Languages Association* (MLA) citation style.

Until 2009 the classroom in the Augustana Library did not contain computer stations at each desk, therefore a lecture model was the primary method of course delivery. However, to adhere to the spirit of IL as an interactive process, in-class exercises and discussion were incorporated whenever possible. In addition, the assignments were directly related to the preceding lecture by providing a hands-on experience for the students to examine the database or reflect on the concepts as soon as possible after the class. In 2009 Augustana opened a new library which has a fully equipped computer lab classroom which allows for a significant hands-on experience in class for students.

Assignments

Each assignment was tied to at least one ACRL outcome and required the student to either reflect on the topic discussed in class or get hands-on experience with a resource (e.g., catalogue, database, or print material) covered. The nature of the assignments was cumulative in that they acted as building blocks to support the development of knowledge and skills enabling students to gather and critically evaluate a variety of sources for use in their major term paper.

Pretests and Post-tests

Assessment has been an important component of MUS 228 since its inception. As such, a pretest and post-

test assessment model was chosen. To ensure a fair process these tests were designed and approved in accordance with the standards of Augustana's Research Ethics Board, and re-approved in 2004 by the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board. The pretest was administered to determine the IL level of students at the beginning of the course as well as to identify weak areas that may need special attention or emphasis during the course. The post-test was administered at the completion of the course to assess any changes in IL competency. Additional questions were asked on the post-test to gauge the usefulness of the course assignments from the students' perspective. These results are reported in Table 1 under "Student Feedback on Module Assignment." The most indicative results of change from the pretest to post-test appear below in Table 2.

COURSE CONTENT

The following modules were covered over the course of 12 classes which met weekly for 75 minutes. These modules have been significantly revised and updated since 2001, therefore, what is presented in the following table reflects the most recent version of the modules, assignments, and commentary. The assignments have been revised over the years based on student feedback and evolving understanding of IL best practices, however, the core learning objectives have remained constant. Sample assignments can be obtained by contacting the author.

Table 1

	Course Content Summarized	
Module 1	**Module Objective:** To raise awareness and appreciation of the incredible mass and complexity of information thereby convincing students of the relevance of IL for their needs.	**Module Description:** This module seeks to define information from a variety of perspectives, including IL, and addresses the anxiety most students experience regarding library research.
	Module Assignment: This assignment requires students to reflect on their experiences with information in light of a reading from *Information Anxiety* (Wurman, 1989). He defines information as something that truly informs or conveys meaning to us against the larger background of data which is all the "noise" in the guise of information which really doesn't tell us anything of substance. Students watch or listen to some media (e.g. television, radio, web) to see if what they encounter would count as information according to Wurman (i.e. does it have meaning for you?).	**Student Feedback on Module Assignment:** 77% of the students rated this assignment as useful to very useful. In their written reflections, students could identify with Wurman's ideas which emphasized that people often feel anxious about information based on a false assumption that they are alone in their ignorance and frustration. Many students expressed relief in embracing his empathetically stated ideas.
Module 2	**Module Objective:** To introduce critical thinking in the context of doing research on the web.	**Module Description:** This module addresses the common reliance students place on web sources like Google to find information for their research papers and to critically evaluate the information they find.
	Module Assignment: This assignment required students to find a webpage on some aspect of music history and critically evaluate it according to criteria covered in class.	**Student Feedback on Module Assignment:** 90% of the students rated this assignment as useful to very useful
Module 3	**Module Objective:** To introduce the process of library research, how to choose a topic to research, determining the nature and extent of information required, and an introduction to key reference resources in music.	**Module Description:** This module addresses how to determine a research topic using reference resources, including unique music resources, as a starting point. The strategy of turning a topic into a research question is introduced in order to determine keywords and useful synonyms. Additional ideas for critically assessing information while reading and writing are introduced.
	Module Assignment: This assignment requires students to search for information on their research question in a print reference resource and an online reference resource. They are required to indicate why the information they chose is relevant to their research question.	**Student Feedback on Module Assignment:** 98% of the students rated this assignment as useful to very useful
Module 4	**Module Objective:** To introduce how materials are organized in the library, search strategies, the library homepage and the library catalogue.	**Module Description:** This module stresses the importance of being familiar with cataloguing & classification systems and introduces search strategies applicable to the library catalogue.
	Module Assignment: This assignment provides hands-on experience searching the library catalogue to find books. Students are also required to use the bibliography of a book they find to locate another relevant source. This illustrates the connection between the way the author has documented sources and the way in which those sources will likely be relevant for the student's own research.	**Student Feedback on Module Assignment:** 91% of the students rated this assignment as useful to very useful
Module 5	**Module Objective:** To introduce periodical literature and periodical indexes/databases.	**Module Description:** This module introduces periodicals and discusses the ways they differ from books. As well, periodical indexes & databases are introduced first through an interdisciplinary database (e.g. *Academic Search Premiere*), then music specific databases (e.g. *RILM* and *International Index to Music Periodicals*).
	Module Assignment: This assignment requires students to search databases for scholarly journal articles relevant to their topic. They record all the bibliographic elements of the articles for future citing. They are graded on the relevance of the articles chosen as well as their search strategies as revealed in their search histories.	**Student Feedback on Module Assignment:** 80% of the students rated this assignment as useful to very useful
Module 6	**Module Objective:** To introduce documentation and plagiarism avoidance.	**Module Description:** This module introduces the principles of documentation, compares different citation styles, focuses on MLA style, and discusses issues of academic integrity.
	Module Assignment: This assignment requires students to take a number of poorly formatted citations and produce a corrected version in MLA works cited format.	**Student Feedback on Module Assignment:** 84% of the students rated this assignment as useful to very useful

FINAL ASSIGNMENT

Music 228 also has one exam and a final "take home" assignment. The final assignment tests students' IL knowledge and skills developed over the entire course. Most students do very well on the final assignment which suggests a positive outcome in terms of IL learning objectives.

Table 2

Significant findings from the Pretests and Post-tests		
Concept	Correct response by test	
	Pretest	Post-test
Correct identification of a book chapter citation	52%	83%
Correct understanding of truncation	33%	99%
Correct understanding of a journal abstract's purpose	40%	93%
Correct understanding of Boolean operators	58%	84%
Correct understanding of nesting	38%	93%

CHALLENGES

Getting the course designed and established was certainly the biggest challenge. However, keeping it going for the past 10 years has also been a challenge due to workload issues. Specifically, the success of this course caused other faculty to request similar courses for their disciplines. While this was very positive in terms of expanding an effective IL program, it substantially increased the workload on a small staff of librarians. As mentioned under the "Course design" section above, our IL course offerings eventually increased to include 21 disciplines. Eventually, we constructed a model (Goebel & Neff, 2007) which made the workload manageable, however, due to space limitations it cannot be described here.

CONCLUSION

Based on the pretest and post-test results, final assignment, student and faculty feedback I can say that this course has been very successful in terms of significantly increasing the IL knowledge and skills of music students. Students often comment on how valuable they found the course to be, not just for music research, but for library research in other disciplines too.

When music students make these comments to me, faculty and especially other students, one could say they are "singing the praises of IL".

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