COLLABORATIVE DEVELOPMENT OF A FLIPPED INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL FOR A FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE COURSE

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BACKGROUND

In 2014, I assumed responsibility for library support of a new first-year experience course at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg (USFSP). The goal of the course, University Success, is to support First Time in College (FTIC) students, focusing on their transition to the university and academic community. Course content is organized into several major topics relevant to transition and retention. As originally proposed, this included “library resources” as a sub-topic under the major topic, Technology in College. The syllabus indicated there would be a guest speaker from the library and a library visit.

At that time, I proposed a new, holistic approach for library support of first-year students, which essentially reframed information literacy instruction in the context of student transition to college. My aim was to provide experiences that would be of a more immediate value as students transitioned and adapted to university life. Rather than teaching a standard set of searching skills and resources, the focus would be on issues associated with learning about and adapting to the demands and expectations of college. There would be increased attention to the affective learning domain and a focus on ways of thinking that are appropriate for college information use. Rather than simply presenting and demonstrating information resources and skills, there would be more in-class interaction.

The new information literacy content consisted of two face-to-face interactive class sessions. The first session consisted mostly of facilitated activities that focused on the relationship between information literacy and critical thinking. I guided the class discussions as students contrasted college libraries with high school libraries and college level information use with their experience in high school. The second session focused on search planning and preparation, selection and evaluation of sources, and appropriate strategies and tools. I led students through what I call the “pre-search” stage of research, in which they unpacked and analyzed an assignment and identified tasks and needs before searching. I also provided students with hands-on practice using the library website and some basic search techniques and tools.

This approach was adopted by the University Success program and followed successfully for several semesters as course enrollment grew and new sections were added. Over time, there was concern for issues of scale and available librarian support. As often is the case, time in class for information literacy content was also a factor that limited content. To address these issues, I was directed to redesign the information literacy component, with the goals of decreasing librarian time commitment and reaching more students. The solution was to move much of the content online in the form of learning modules, a directive that posed certain challenges. It also presented opportunities, for example, the ability to provide additional content. Essentially, I was tasked with “flipping” the information literacy component of the University Success course. Information literacy is one of several major topics in the course and even with a flipped approach, there is limited room for its content. This necessitated making difficult choices and prioritizing goals and objectives. A larger portion of the content would now come from the online modules, complemented by a hands-on workshop.
MODULE DEVELOPMENT

To accomplish these goals, I sought help from a professional instructional designer with whom I collaborated in the online module development process. The development effort focused mainly on planning and creating the online modules. We used an iterative approach to the developing the modules, essentially a “backward design” process. In contrast with traditional “forward design” that begins with content, backward design first establishes and considers the learning goals and outcomes, then works backward to consider how this would be assessed and how the content should be taught. Broadly, it uses a sequence of three stages for planning a curricular unit: 1) Identify desired results; 2) Determine acceptable evidence; and 3) Plan learning experiences and instruction (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). Our approach generally followed that process.

Preparatory Work

Preparation and early planning involved making key decisions and setting parameters for the project. The desired results centered on information literacy learning outcomes and were informed by selected concepts in ACRL’s Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education (2015). From the outset, it was important to make clear the connections between information literacy and the goals and content of the University Success course. I began by drafting information literacy learning outcomes for the course. I constructed them in the context of student transition and mostly in the affective learning domain, focusing on things such as attitudes, motivations, awareness, and valuing. The outcomes suggested, in measurable terms, what students should know and understand after completing the course. The proposed outcomes helped guide our thinking and the module development.

Prior to module creation, I identified three topical areas of the course that were most relevant to information literacy: University Culture, Critical Thinking, and Information Literacy. (Other topics, such as Time Management, were tangentially related to information literacy; however, those connections would be made more informally.) For each of those, I selected appropriate information literacy outcomes, mapping them to the course content as a whole.

It also was important that module content reflect appropriate concepts from ACRL’s Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education. I found that information literacy content for University Success primarily involved three of the six frames: Research as Inquiry, Scholarship as Conversation, and Searching as Strategic Exploration. We used these concepts during module development and incorporated key terms and basic ideas into the module scripts and content.

Assessing information literacy learning in a course can be challenging and identifying acceptable evidence of learning is not always simple. Smaller formal and informal assessments are often the best strategy. Because information literacy outcomes for this course are mostly in the affective domain, we did not try to assess overall competence in specific skills. Rather, our design provided feedback to students during learning, and included assessment within the modules in the form of periodic multiple choice and short answer questions to check the student’s understanding along the way.

When planning the online instruction, I made decisions about what content could be presented online and what would be best to remain face-to-face. Both in-class sessions were interactive and included students demonstrating their existing approaches to finding information. My initial plan was to transfer only the process-oriented content to online modules and add content and more in-depth treatment of the material. Because they were so interactive, I was hesitant about converting this content to an online form. Students’ engagement and early contact with a librarian were aspects instructors valued, and I was doubtful they could be adequately replicated online.

Module Creation

Module development involved collaboration between myself and an instructional designer. I began by writing a draft script for each module in PowerPoint. We made prototype modules by recording videos of me presenting each PowerPoint lesson with a “scratch” audio voiceover. The scratch recordings were tentative narrations I made, using the draft scripts, which we used to give us a feel for the overall product. It became clear that reading from those scripts felt too formal and was not very engaging. The instructional designer devised a creative method of capturing both style and content of the in-class sessions. To create more authentic scripts, we arranged mock instruction sessions in a studio classroom, with staff members acting as “students.” I facilitated those sessions as I would in a typical University Success class, while we recorded them. This captured more of my natural presentation and facilitation style, that is, kept it in my “voice.” Transcripts of those recorded sessions became the core of the scripts. We asked observers and note-takers to capture important points to emphasize in the final narration, as well as identify places to add images, question-and-answer sections, or other ways to engage module users.

Instructional design staff used 3Play Media to transcribe the audio recordings of the sessions, generating module scripts. I edited the scripts and noted specific points of emphasis, and images and questions I wanted to include. This process captured the more relaxed and interactive feel of a classroom, and is reflected in the language, examples, and incorporation of questions and responses. An experienced narrator recorded the final voiceover for the modules. The instructional designer applied the voiceover
to the animation (using the PowToon platform), editing and adding new animation and images where necessary. The script was also used to caption the videos.

The instructional designer then finalized the three modules and put them into Google Forms for delivery, adding the proposed questions. I reviewed the final version and we agreed on the final product. In the end, the three new online modules were made available to University Success classes, representing a significant portion of the information literacy content of the course. Students are now expected to complete all three modules early in the semester and attend the hands-on library workshop.

The Modules

Module #1 is titled *Information Literacy in College*. It focuses on the differences between high school and college level information sources and searching strategies. Its content connects with the major course topics University Culture and Information Literacy. It addresses ACRL Framework concepts of Scholarship as Conversation and Research as Inquiry.

Module #2 is titled *The Pre-Search Stage*. It focuses on a general process for analyzing a research assignment in order to plan and conduct information searches appropriately. Its content connects with the major course topics Information Literacy and Critical Thinking. It addresses ACRL Framework concepts of Searching as Strategic Exploration and Research as Inquiry.

Module #3 is titled *Planning Your Search*. It focuses on using proper search techniques to find appropriate resources for research. Its content connects with the major course topics Information Literacy and Critical Thinking. It addresses the ACRL Framework concept of Searching as Strategic Exploration.

**THE COLLABORATIVE APPROACH**

Our collaborative approach was the key to the success of this project. The cross disciplinary nature of this collaboration expanded the perspectives, knowledge, and skills available for the project. As a librarian, I brought familiarity with the course and experience with information literacy. The instructional designer brought a design perspective and expertise in online learning, assessment, and technology. The development process was iterative and creative; our thinking and the products evolved as we progressed. Although we began with a plan, we adapted as new ideas entered and problems arose, which we solved. At certain points, it made sense to go in a different direction, and so we did.

Because of our different perspectives and expertise, and our open communications, we were able to apply new ideas and try things we had not anticipated. For example, I had been hesitant to translate portions of the classroom content to modules, believing we would lose the engagement students and instructors valued in that session. The instructional designer proposed a solution that was creative and maintained the natural feel of the face-to-face sessions. Though the modules lost the in-person connection, they do engage and reach more students.

This project benefitted from multiple perspectives and collaboration across disciplines. Cross disciplinary collaboration brings to bear different but complementary perspectives that both add value to the end goals. The end product is stronger and would not have been possible using only one perspective and skill set. The process we developed for this project was successful, and was subsequently used to update other online modules and create new ones. Our cross disciplinary collaborative approach also can be a model for other libraries developing online learning modules.

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**REFERENCES**
