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"The Times They Are A'Changing:" Information Literacy Instruction, Faculty Ownership, and Student Success

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Typically, disciplinary faculty understand information literacy, or “research” skills, to be the purview of librarians and not a part of their own teaching. But an emerging body of scholarship (Badke, 2012; Farrell & Badke, 2015) indicates that students learn the research process best when these skills are taught in the context of a course or a discipline. Put simply, students need to know how knowledge is created and disseminated in their discipline in order to truly participate in the “scholarly conversation” and contribute as knowledge creators themselves.

So, how do librarians push back? What can they do to ensure a campus culture of shared ownership of IL instruction? As the only two librarians serving a small community college, we had to think strategically about where to focus our instructional efforts in order to maximize impact on student learning. While one-shot instruction and embedded librarianship are widely regarded as essential practices of any library instruction program, they are limited in terms of their impact on student learning. Librarians usually do not have enough face-time with students to facilitate cognitive transfer of IL skills. In other words, students are not practicing IL skills enough to internalize them as a habit.

For this reason, we decided to shift the focus of our IL program from teaching students via one-shots to teaching disciplinary faculty how to teach IL. Although we are not the first to argue for a “teach the teachers” model (Cowan & Eva, 2016; Risë & Mundt, 1997), little has been written about its application. This article explains how we used an IL curriculum enhancement grant to educate faculty about the importance of co-owning IL instruction and to motivate them to actually do it. Based on our success, we hope to encourage other instruction librarians to be more selective when responding to faculty member’s requests for one-shot instruction and to instead focus more of their energy on efforts that will most improve student learning.

ABOUT THE COLLEGE

Students

Guttman Community College, currently located in Midtown Manhattan, was established in 2008 by then Chancellor Matthew Goldstein with the primary purpose of improving graduation rates, a challenge endemic to not only New York City community colleges but community colleges nationwide. Part of Guttman’s mission is to provide access to quality, affordable education to all of the city’s residents. When the school officially opened its doors in 2013, it welcomed a class of 300 students, all from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities. Since then, the school has continued to expand and has more than tripled in size.

As of Fall 2017, 1,066 students were enrolled. Among them, 53% were female and 47% male. Over half of them, 59%, identified as racially or ethnically Hispanic. Guttman is designated by the Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). Unlike most community colleges, almost all of Guttman’s students are traditionally college-aged. In the fall of 2017, 96% of students were aged 22 or younger. These percentages can be partly explained by the school’s unique model. In contrast to most other community colleges in the U.S., Guttman requires that all incoming freshmen enroll full-time. Otherwise, students at Guttman fit the general description of community college students elsewhere in America. They come from mostly low-income households (in 2017, 71% received need-based financial aid); they are mostly minorities; they are mostly first-generation college students; and, importantly, they are almost all in need of some kind remediation.

The Guttman Model

Recognizing the fact that the longer community college students spend in remediation, the less likely they are to persist and graduate, Guttman's founders explored new and creative alternatives to replace traditional approaches, and, embracing experiential theories of education, they designed an entirely new model for community college education. Most importantly non-credit bearing remedial education courses were completely rejected and replaced with an interdisciplinary curriculum that addresses remedial needs in the context of credit-bearing courses.

The First Year Experience (FYE) program at Guttman is the hallmark of this model. Like other FYE programs, it was designed to foster student retention and, therefore, students' persistence toward graduation. However, unlike most FYE programs, the Guttman FYE is highly structured. Students are divided into six different "Houses" which are then divided into three cohorts, comprised of approximately 25 students each. For the first year, students take virtually all of their courses with their assigned cohort. They also follow a daily, half-day block schedule.

Because of the curriculum's integrated and interdisciplinary design, faculty teaching in the first year must work closely together. In fact, an entire team of instructors is assigned to each House. Each team includes disciplinary faculty who are teaching an FYE course, a student advisor, and a librarian. Because the instructional team is so imperative to the FYE and the model, the founders tried to eliminate or reduce any institutional barriers to communication among faculty by eliminating departments, including the library. All teaching faculty, librarians and student advisors share the same office space in order to facilitate communication. Furthermore, all House instructional teams must meet once a week for 1.5 hours to plan and discuss courses, assignments, and student-related issues.

CREATING A CULTURE OF SHARED IL INSTRUCTION

The founders of our college seemed to also recognize the importance of teaching skills in context when they recommended in their "Concept Paper" (2008) that required courses embed "advanced reading, writing, quantitative reasoning, and information literacy skills" (p. 27) into the first-year curriculum. However, while Guttman's unique institutional circumstances and FYE instructional teams have certainly promoted relationship-building and collaboration among disciplinary faculty and librarians, the college's model has not eliminated the problem of getting faculty to co-own IL instruction. Unlike quantitative reasoning, reading and writing skills, which are components attached to specific for-credit classes in the FYE, there is no similar home for IL in the curriculum. In other words, we continue to face the same dilemma as librarians at traditional academic libraries with regard to developing faculty ownership of IL.

Our first move to shift this culture was to create a toolkit of lesson plans, active learning exercises and handouts that our faculty could easily use and adapt for their own instruction. We published the toolkit on our website in early January 2017. Though we regularly promoted the toolkit during team meetings and faculty were using the handouts, explicit IL instruction seemed to be lacking. Institutional assessment data revealed that at the capstone (graduation) level, 20% of the 86 assignments that were rated contained no opportunity for students to locate, evaluate and cite multiple information sources, and, of those remaining assignments, only 3% demonstrated this skill at the highest (capstone) level (Guttman Community College, 2017).

To address this problem, we applied for an internal "Guttman Innovation Grant," aimed at revising, refining, and improving the college's model. In our application, we proposed creating a curriculum enhancement project to incentivize Composition I and Composition II faculty to revise their curriculum and to explicitly embed IL into their course learning outcomes. We targeted Composition faculty specifically since these courses are both required and taken in sequence, which would allow for intentional, consistent scaffolding of IL within the Guttman curriculum.

Our Curriculum Enhancement Project Proposal

In our grant application, we requested enough funds to offer four English faculty a stipend of \$1,000 to revise their Composition curriculum for the Spring 2018 semester. To earn the stipend, faculty agreed to submit their syllabi for our review, participate in a two-hour professional development workshop, revise their syllabi to incorporate relevant IL lessons, and participate in a focus group.

Another key feature of our proposal was that we would not teach *any* one-shots in these faculty members' Composition courses. Again, the purpose of this project was to help faculty feel comfortable teaching IL on their own. We offered to work with them in consultation and to create IL activities tailored to their assignments and/or class session objectives. But they had to do the actual instruction themselves.

As a further stipulation of the stipend, we also asked for samples of their students' work (for assessment) and that they participate in a focus group so we could gather qualitative feedback about their teaching experience. Using this information, we wanted to assess if and how their assignments contributed to students' learning of IL and whether there were areas that needed improvement.

We proposed a budget of \$6,120, which was enough funds to cover four faculty stipends, transcription services for our focus group, and estimated travel expenses (in anticipation of presenting our findings at a library conference such as LOEX).

The Syllabi Review (two months before the semester)

First, we asked faculty to submit a draft of their syllabus to us at least one month before the spring semester started, so we could identify areas in the curriculum where IL skills may come into play and need instruction. After the syllabi review, we required the four faculty members to attend and participate in a two-hour professional development workshop in which we modeled ways to teach these skills and showed them how to use and modify the resources in our IL Faculty Toolkit. Next, faculty revised their syllabi and then resubmitted them to us and, before the spring semester began, we offered a final round of written feedback for them to incorporate into their finalized syllabus.

All four faculty submitted their syllabi for our review. Although their courses varied in thematic focus—from comic superheroes, to youth culture, to media studies, to immigration—all of their assignments involved proposing a topic or research question and finding, evaluating, synthesizing, and citing secondary sources into a written paper.

In the first round of syllabi review, we found several areas in which IL skills were implicit in the task but not addressed in instruction. For example, students were asked to submit their research topics, but no class time was dedicated to teaching them how to refine and narrow their topic into a question that would be manageable to research. They also asked students to locate scholarly articles without framing this requirement in the context of information types and how and why scholarship is created. Perhaps the most obvious gap across these four courses was on citation: students were required to cite in a particular style, but no instructional time was devoted to teaching students the purpose of citation and how to use a style guide.

With this information in mind, we organized a professional development workshop that would show faculty how they could explicitly address these IL skills in their instruction.

The Professional Development Workshop (one month before the semester)

We gathered all four faculty into a meeting room for two hours so we could explain 1) why it is necessary that they teach IL skills and 2) how they can teach IL skills that are relevant to their Composition courses. We drew from the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, and we also appealed to the faculty members' own experience teaching Composition and the unrealistic expectation placed on them to turn poor writers into fluent writers in just one or two semesters. Just like Composition faculty need disciplinary faculty to teach and reinforce these skills, so do librarians with research skills.

Most of this workshop was dedicated to modeling instruction techniques, using a train-the-trainer approach. For example, we demonstrated concept mapping, drawing from their syllabi for examples, framing the exercise in the threshold concept "scholarship as conversation" and showing how they could use the concept map to help students narrow their research topics. Similarly, we showed how they could use handouts from our Faculty Toolkit to create keywords from a research question or evaluate the authority of a source.

In addition, we identified small ways they could address IL in their instruction. For example, we told them that when they assign readings they should contextualize them by asking students what type of information it is (e.g., a news article, blog article, scholarly article, etc.), *who* created it (and whether they have authority on the topic), and why it was created. We also encouraged them to assess students' learning informally by asking them to identify the pertinent citation information of their readings (e.g., "What is the title of the article/chapter?" "What is the title of the source, or where was it published?"). Some of the faculty realized that they had been taking this skill for granted and had not recognized the complexity of this task for their born-digital students. Because everything looks similar on a screen, faculty can help students by simply drawing attention to information types so they can begin to see the different ways information is produced and how this process can affect the credibility and value of the information.

After the workshop, faculty revised their syllabi and re-submitted them to us before the semester began. We reviewed and critiqued their syllabi for a second time and offered suggestions for further revisions in the form of typed responses. For example, during an in-class writing workshop on adding citations, we recommended instructing and modeling citation styles with their students. Additionally, we suggested reinforcing scholarship as conversation—and imparting the notion of student as emerging scholar—during another class session where students conducted peer review on other students' drafts.

Assessment (end of semester)

Towards the end of the semester, we surveyed students in all four sections to assess their perceived gains in IL, as well as their knowledge of IL. Of the 108 usable responses, we found that everyone agreed or somewhat agreed that their coursework had helped them improve their information seeking skills. In addition, in response to the knowledge application survey questions, 48 students could identify the Info Commons/Library or a specific database for finding background information for their research. Without a control group, little meaning in terms of students' actual gains can be derived from this data. But at least it shows that students perceived gains in their IL skills *without* direct librarian intervention. In other words, faculty-led IL instruction is effective at least in terms of students' perceptions of themselves as developing researchers.

Finally, we met for a focus group interview to gather faculty feedback. Unfortunately, two of the faculty were unable to attend the meeting, so it was not a true focus group as we had planned. Still, the prevailing theme that came out of the conversation was that faculty sensed that the quality of student work had improved in comparison to student work in previous semesters. Faculty also noted that the syllabi review was one of the most useful aspects of the project, as it gave them the opportunity to scaffold IL skills more intentionally throughout the course.

CONCLUSION

In the future, we plan to administer a student pre- and post-test and a control group in order to measure actual gains in students' learning as a result of faculty-led IL instruction. Additionally, we plan to work with instructors in the Programs of Study (Business Administration, Health & Human Services, Information Technology, Liberal Arts and Sciences, Urban Studies), so that IL skills are reinforced and intentionally scaffolded beyond the FYE program. We anticipate that intentionally integrated IL skills will prepare our students to become better critical thinkers, armed with the necessary skills to enter the workforce or transition to a four-year college.

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