

# **TAILORING INFORMATION LITERACY INSTRUCTION WITH INTERNATIONAL FLAIR: PARTNERING FOR GLOBAL REACH**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Global study and engagement with the world are the foundations of education at many American campuses. The more teaching and learning taking place in an international context, the better—especially in today’s highly interconnected world. According to a study by the Institute of International Education, in 2011-2012, 283,332 American students studied abroad for academic credit. This is a 3.4% increase from the previous 2010-2011 academic year. Furthermore, over the past two decades U.S. student participation in study abroad programs tripled (Opendoors, 2013). Of those American students studying abroad, 86.7 % (n=245,649) are undergraduates. This number represents 9.4% of the entire undergraduate student population in the United States. In addition, there were 819,644 international students studying in the United States in 2012-2013, which is a 7.2% growth from the previous year. In summary, the old cliché that “I don’t need to learn languages because I am an English speaker” is no longer a valid argument. To date, 65% of undergraduate institutions have already included a foreign language graduation requirement (ACE, 2012, p. 11).

Internationalization on American campuses is certainly a growing trend. The focus of this presentation is the role of the library and information literacy instruction in furthering internationalization at American universities and colleges. The case presented in this presentation is the Waidner-Spahr Library at Dickinson College—a private, liberal arts institution located in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

## **HOW DO WE RECOGNIZE INTERNATIONALIZATION ON OUR CAMPUSES?**

The American Council of Education (ACE) Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses 2012 report indicates that 78% of baccalaureate institutions perceive that

“internalization has accelerated on their campuses in recent years” (ACE, 2012, p. 6). What is meant by the term internalization? How do we recognize internationalization on our campuses? How will this concept affect the library and information science profession? As librarians, we observe more foreign students coming to the library uncertain about the library system. Most likely, we notice international students working individually and quietly, as well as students who often times use the library as a social hub. We probably see library cafeterias filled with students chatting and reading newspapers in multiple languages. Also, I suspect most librarians have experienced a research consultation with an American student and just as we were ready to drop all our library wisdom, the student stunned us with their international experiences and worldliness. Finally, in our college diners we can easily buy sushi, hummus, and kosher food along with a burger, Coke and french fries. All of the above examples are visual features of “internationalization” on campus; however, this concept encompasses a much broader meaning.

ACE’s Center for Internationalization and Global Engagement defines “Comprehensive Internationalization” as “a strategic, coordinated process that seeks to align and integrate international policies, programs, and initiatives, and positions colleges and universities as more globally oriented and internationally connected” (ACE, 2012, p. 3). In order to meet these imperatives, institutions of higher education shall: articulate their commitment to “internationalization” in mission statements and strategic plans; incorporate a language requirement into the curriculum; strive for diversity among the faculty and staff, and encourage students’ mobility and international collaboration and cooperation (ACE, 2012, p. 4). Furthermore, the goal of 21st century education, according to ACE, is “preparing students to live and work in a society that increasingly operates across international borders” (ACE, 2012, p.6).

## DICKINSON COLLEGE, WAIDNER-SPAHR LIBRARY AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WORLD



As you cross our academic quad, you pass by a signpost listing the distance between Dickinson and various points around the world. This signpost stands not only to remind us of our international study locations, but also as a symbol of how global study and engagement is a cornerstone of the Dickinson experience. (Global Study and Engagement, 2014)

Dickinson College is a private liberal arts institution located in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The College is committed to the idea of internationalization and engagement with the world and expresses this commitment in multiple ways. With more than 40 programs in 24 countries, Dickinson is ranked among the top schools in the United States for their study abroad programs (U.S. News & World Reports, 2013). Furthermore, 7% of the overall student population at Dickinson is comprised of international students. In regards to faculty and professional administration hiring policies, the College provides equal opportunities for international applicants. In addition, all undergraduate students must complete work in a foreign language through the intermediate level, with some departments requiring students to complete advanced work in a non-English language.

Waidner-Spahr Library is the center of academic life at Dickinson College and as such, actively participates in advancing the idea of internationalization on the Dickinson campus. Our symbol of this commitment is a wall of clocks located on the main floor in the library, showing the current time in eight different worldwide locations. The library collection includes nearly 100,000 books and an impressive collection of DVDs and journals in multiple languages. Recently, we also installed a display entitled “Dickinson READS the World: Books for Language Learners.” The display features “easy readings” (fiction, nonfiction, graphic novels, etc.) for language learners. However, the role of the library is not limited only to collection development or facilities. Dickinson librarians teach information literacy in foreign language courses, participate in orientations and preparatory sessions for students going to study abroad, and provide research support in composition classes for international students.

## Information Literacy Instruction in Foreign Language Courses

The idea of integrating foreign language into library sessions was born from a conversation I had my first semester at Dickinson with Spanish professor Mariana Past in Fall 2012. She asked me to teach research skills to her Spanish composition classes. Once she learned I have some skills in Spanish, she suggested that, at the very least, I should greet her students in Spanish at the beginning of class. I was terrified! As a native Polish speaker, I vividly remember teaching my first class in English. And I will always remember standing in front of Dickinson students and stammering in Spanish for the first time. Surprisingly, students responded to this introduction very well. They genuinely appreciated my imperfect but earnest efforts.

This experience encouraged me to take a Spanish course the following semester and to create new library learning activities in this language. Taking this course, with other students as peers, and exposing my own struggles, were invaluable experiences. First, I gained a deeper understanding of the curriculum. Second, I observed how students at Dickinson learn languages and how they responded to classroom activities. Most importantly, it gave me an idea of how to design activities that they will find relevant. I developed Jeopardy and trivia games involving research questions in Spanish with the use of iPads. The students stayed alert and ready to think and respond in Spanish throughout the session. According to professor Past, “students responded extremely well to the competitive Jeopardy trivia game, which involved questions (in Spanish) on how to use research databases for literary criticism.” She continued, “in the eight years that I have taught at Dickinson, this was by far the most successful information literacy session I have observed, because the active learning techniques got everyone involved.”

In the Spring 2014 semester, I also incorporated information literacy activities in Spanish for the Business Professions classes. For these, students were doing business research for a Latin American company in a given country and they did a fabulous job. Now, after incorporating Spanish into more than ten library sessions, I am no longer terrified, but inspired to improve my language skills and my creative instructional methods. Also, in the Spring 2014 my colleague Kirk Doran designed information literacy sessions in German that were met with overwhelming enthusiasm by the German department faculty and students.

There are many benefits of using this blended approach. It captures students’ attention and fosters their curiosity. Many of our students at Dickinson participate in study abroad programs, and a library session in a non-English language introduces them to research and library-relevant vocabulary, which they can use while they are studying abroad. Finally, blended sessions are challenging, dynamic and interactive. Neither Kirk nor I are fluent in Spanish and German, but I believe that by revealing our imperfections and our courage, we set a good example to our students.

## **Orientations for Students Going to Study Abroad**

One might ask why students need a library orientation when they go abroad. Isn't the purpose of their travel to immerse themselves in different cultures? It certainly is; however, there are also a myriad of reasons why students need to know about the remote access options to the resources in their home library while they are abroad. The following story of former Dickinson student Katie Clark, Norwich Science Program Fall 2010, demonstrates the validity of this point:

During finals week the entire campus lost internet and the library essentially shut down. Immediately after finals week I was supposed to leave for home when a snow storm hit London and shut Heathrow down, delaying my flight for a week. I had a paper to complete that counted for a little over 50% of my grade in one course. The professor was not particularly sympathetic about either the internet crash or the snow storm. He was only willing to extend the deadline by a few days. So, I found myself sitting on the floor of Heathrow, wrapped in something that Heathrow employees insisted was a blanket, but looked suspiciously like an extra-large sheet of tin foil, trying to complete a 15 page research paper. Luckily, I was able to remotely access the Dickinson Library website and resources from London. I used Dickinson databases to locate journal articles and completed my paper on time. I passed the course and made it back home just in time for Christmas.

Katie needed to use the library because the technology at her target campus crashed; however, there are many more reasons why Dickinson students might need to use Waidner-Spahr Library while abroad. Some of the students work on their honor's research theses while abroad and the libraries there might not be as resourceful, or the librarians may not be available for help. Also, one of our goals is to promote student research. During those pre-departure orientations we encourage students to work on research projects while abroad. We meet with each study abroad program for an approximately 25 minute session prior to their departure and inform them of resources available remotely, and services such as sending Dickinson books internationally or Skype research assistance, and research opportunities.

## **Orientations and Workshops for International Students**

Library orientations for international students are very common in American academia, though they usually take place within a few days of students' arrival and are limited to a one-time meeting. What often happens is that these meetings are completely ineffective and they leave students even more overwhelmed and confused. I came to the United States as an international student from Poland to pursue my graduate education and so I am particularly well-positioned to understand the needs of students who come to the United States from different countries. Based on my own personal experiences, as well as my conversations with other

international students, I do support the initial, one-time library orientation at the beginning of the semester for students; however, this orientation should be expanded.

I clearly remember providing my first one-time library orientation at Dickinson College with 60 pairs of jet lagged and overwhelmed eyes staring at me. In the first few days on campus, students are overloaded with information about immigration rules and regulations, classes, professors, student life, and basic information, such as where they can find food they are used to, where they can practice religion, or how to contact family. As we can imagine the "library stuff" will go all the way to the bottom of this priority list and most likely will be forgotten rather quickly.

For all of the aforementioned reasons, at Dickinson we decided to use an incremental approach while introducing international students to the library. The first orientation is a brief 30 minute library scavenger hunt where students set out to find a book, a room in the library, or to ask a librarian for help. This last part, where students need to find a librarian and ask question, is very important, because in many countries it would be considered "bothering" someone. Students need to be aware up front that we are here to help them and their questions are welcomed and encouraged. Whoever completes the scavenger hunt first receives a \$25 bookstore gift card; therefore, this element of competition motivates and engages students, while also facilitating their introduction to library resources.

We meet with international students for the second time during the third or fourth week of the semester for a Research & Writing Workshop. We have decided that this time is optimal because students are already familiar with their class syllabi, they have a general idea of what is expected of them throughout the semester, they are generally settled on the campus, and we have found that this time also coincides with their first project or assignment due dates. This workshop is conducted in cooperation with the Writing Center and we introduce students to the library collection, basics of academic research, writing rules, and tips on preventing plagiarism. The workshops are interactive in nature and include such active learning techniques as group work, discussions, simple writing exercises, and time for individual questions.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The Global Approach Information Literacy Program at Dickinson College has been a successful initiative to promote internationalization in the Waidner-Spahr Library and throughout the campus. The main premises of the program are:

- Teaching information literacy sessions in foreign languages.
- Offering orientation programs for international students, while considering cultural differences and language barriers.

- Hosting preparatory research sessions for students going abroad.
- Maintaining ongoing communication with students working on their research projects abroad via email and Skype.
- Cooperating with the Dickinson Writing Center by providing research assistance in composition classes for international students.

The most important lesson we have learned from this project is to not be afraid to experiment and get out of the comfort zone. In most circumstances this courage was rewarded. Also, the more people and offices involved in promoting internationalization on the campus – the better. Many may think that multilingual information literacy sessions and global libraries are unrealistic, but considering the ubiquity of international forces in today’s highly interconnected world, I am a firm believer that this is the path towards success in our profession.

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