Upstairs-downstairs: Working with a campus assessment coordinator and other allies for effective information literacy assessment

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Abstract

At a 2008 assessment conference, Megan Oakleaf and Lisa Hinchliffe noted that one barrier librarians face when trying to conduct assessment is lack of coordination. This barrier was removed for GGU's librarians when Lisa Kramer was hired as Director of Assessment and Evaluation and made her expertise and support available to us. She helped us understand the difference between program evaluation and learning assessment, and acted as a sounding board in the design of a new assessment study. We describe our environment at GGU, our assessment goals, and our study design, then discuss preliminary results and possible next steps.

Introduction

Golden Gate University (GGU) is a small school composed mostly of nontraditional students seeking business and professional graduate degrees. Although the majority of our students are in graduate programs, we find that our users still need research instruction. This may be because students are returning to academia after a hiatus and need information on how resources have changed. Additionally, our large population of international students often need to be oriented to American expectations for research and critical thinking.

However, without an information literacy credit course, our access to students in the classroom depends on conducting outreach to faculty in the hopes of an invitation to give a one-shot presentation. This "academic champions" model - relying on the continuing hospitality of individual faculty members - is not as sustainable as having information literacy embedded in the curriculum at the programmatic or institutional level. Further, ad hoc cooperation does not add up to strategic or long-term information literacy planning (McGuinness, 2007).

Our library's instruction program seeks to initiate more collaboration at a curricular level. When GGU hired Dr. Lisa Kramer as Director of Assessment in preparation for an upcoming WASC visit, we gained access to her expertise and support. Her knowledge and assistance enabled us to design a learning assessment study that we hope will bring us closer to this goal.

Megan Oakleaf and Lisa Hinchliffe have identified lack of coordination as a significant barrier to conducting assessment for instruction librarians (Oakleaf & Hinchliffe, 2008). Bearing out this finding, we can say firsthand that having a smart, committed, and trustworthy coordinator in Dr. Kramer did make all the difference to our research project. We relied on her expertise when planning a study that will help us leverage our involvement with one department into more in-depth instruction opportunities in other departments.

Discussion Session

One crucial lesson that we learned from Dr. Kramer is the difference between learning assessment and program evaluation:

- Program evaluation: Study your program to find out whether it's meeting your goals
- Learning assessment: Study whether students gained knowledge, skills, and abilities as a result of your instruction

Compared to a credit course or embedded instruction, a one-shot presentation is not a setting where measurable student learning takes place. So it doesn't make sense to do learning

assessment on a one-hour session. You can assess whether the program is working the way you want it to, but if you want to measure learning you've got to do a specific kind of evaluation - learning assessment. On the other hand, if you have an opportunity to do more in-depth teaching, then it makes sense to do a learning assessment study; and in that case, it's best to directly test knowledge, skills, or abilities, rather than relying on student self-reporting.

We would like to develop a relationship with the Undergraduate Program, which to date has not responded to our overtures to collaborate on mapping information literacy instruction to the undergraduate curriculum. By contrast, the research instruction program has a very collaborative relationship with the Preparation in Language and University Studies (PLUS) program, which offers an immersive semester of language and academic skills remediation to international students who did not pass the TOEFL. Librarian visits are embedded in the PLUS curriculum; a pair of librarians makes 8 visits of 1-2 hours each semester to offer information literacy instruction and support tied to assignments. Librarians also provide input on assignments, shape curriculum, provide language-appropriate reading materials, and help with improving the program from one semester to the next with suggestions and other assistance. We realized that PLUS offered us an opportunity to do a learning assessment study which we might use to persuade the Undergraduate Program to work with us.

Our presentation sparked discussion comments by attendees who had experience with similar situations at their institutions, and we had short discussion bursts throughout our talk. Several of the participants had questions on that age-old conundrum: "How do we get our foot in the door with faculty or programs?" Responses from attendees included starting with those "academic champions" that we already have relationships with, and leverage those outward. Visiting faculty meetings, finding out about shared interests with faculty from their CVs, and just plain old persistence were other suggestions. Knocking on office doors or taking advantage of running into someone in the halls provide face-to-face interaction, which can be the necessary link. This can be a lot of added work, so focusing on a core course within a department can be a useful way to narrow our focus to a manageable workload.

Key Points

Under Dr. Kramer's guidance, we learned that before getting underway with our learning assessment project, we had to determine our study's purpose, goals, audience, and the kind of data that would be necessary to make our case. Our purpose in this project is to produce substantive learning, not just add on more and more one-shot sessions. Our goal is to build on the information literacy instruction model we have in the PLUS program and expand that into other departments. Our audience is the faculty we would like to reach and administrators in GGU, and of course, WASC. As far as data, we needed to demonstrate that PLUS students are learning information literacy concepts because of our intervention.

Like any other library, we were already collecting assessment data to bring to our administration and to WASC. But before we had access to our assessment coordinator, we didn't understand that our strategy mismatched learning assessment with a satisfaction survey. Even if this survey had been perfectly designed, it still would not provide data that could be used for the purpose and audience that we had in mind: demonstrating to departmental faculty and administrators that students need more time and more follow-up with librarians to learn information literacy skills and concepts. After answering those questions about study objectives, we were able to pick an appropriate method of collecting the kinds of data we needed. For our

purposes, we used a mixed methods approach. We administered a quiz and assessed student writing samples with a rubric.

We developed the learning assessment quiz to focus on four quantitative categories (source evaluation, topic development, citation, and library usage), and one category of demographic and self-report information. Each category was covered by three multiple-choice questions, so we could get the average for students' knowledge on that topic. We administered 43 copies of quiz at the beginning of the Fall 2009 semester to the PLUS students, and 40 copies to the same students at the end of that semester. We also administered the quiz to 51 Undergraduate students who don't receive research instruction. This provides us with a point of comparison to discuss with the undergraduate instructors.

The second part of our mixed-methods approach was a systematic examination of work samples, which was the PLUS program's final paper for the Fall 2009 semester. Their assignment was to develop a research question and write a 10-page paper related to a company or industry that they had previously studied. We created a rubric to assess whether the PLUS students were able to apply what they learned from library instruction, and we focused on three of the categories we developed for the quiz (source evaluation, topic development, and citation). For the writing sample assessment, we have 40 research papers, stripped of identifying information. We normed ourselves before each scoring session by scoring one paper and discussing our decisions.

Our preliminary results showed us a mix of what we'd hoped to see as well as some less promising outcomes. The aggregate percentage of the student scores between the three administrations of the quiz indicate improvement between the PLUS pretest and posttest scores, from 54% to 66%, compared to the average score of 60% for Undergraduate students who took the quiz. Some of the categories were more successful than others, however. The source evaluation and topic development categories suggested improvement from PLUS pretest to posttest, but it was minimal. The citation and library usage categories indicated a more dramatic improvement from pretest to posttest for the PLUS students. The PLUS posttest scores were higher than the undergraduate scores for three of the categories, but the undergraduate students scored higher than the PLUS posttest in one category. These results indicate the areas where we could improve our teaching of the PLUS students. The preliminary results from the writing samples assessment further suggest that topic development is one of the areas that needs more work.

As we moved away from our satisfaction survey with Dr. Kramer's help, we also found support for this approach in the literature. In particular, Ragains (1997) makes a very strong case against the common practice of using subjective data - that is, student perceptions of librarians' teaching in one-shot sessions - as a measure of student learning, as an evaluation of librarians' teaching, and as a basis for making program-level decisions about our services. He provocatively suggests that the effort that we expend on satisfaction surveys, and the importance given to results, is misplaced. Further, he suggests that asking students to evaluate teaching librarians after every instruction session "may in fact suggest a presumption of incompetence in their ability to address basic instructional needs" (168). Rather, we might develop more meaningful instruction opportunities which will, in turn, allow us to do more rigorous assessment.

Fortunately, the instruction program's existing relationship with PLUS already gives us one opportunity to do meaningful instruction. One immediate outcome of our study is that we now have detailed assessment information on the effectiveness of our teaching in PLUS, which is the area where we are most easily able to implement changes based on our research. Our hope

is that this study will help us leverage our work with PLUS into more opportunities if our data is persuasive enough to faculty and administrators. We may be able to get the attention of the undergraduate dean with the data demonstrating not only that PLUS students showed improvement as a result of our being mapped to their curriculum, but also that PLUS students did better than the undergrads despite having greater language hurdles to overcome.

GGU's research instruction program is likely to continue to be mostly one-shots, with this kind of heavy involvement being the special exception. It follows, then, that the next major assessment effort should be a program evaluation for all those one-shots. This study would ideally involve input from all the librarians who do one-shots so that we can together define what success looks like for that program and then find a way to measure how we're doing. Using one more lesson from Dr. Kramer - that assessment can be designed for great PR - our next study might complement this one by providing data showing that students are looking for more in-depth research instruction in the context of their programs.

References

McGuinness, C. (2007). Exploring Strategies for Integrated Information Literacy: From "Academic Champions" to Institution-Wide Change. *Communications in Information Literacy*, *1*(1), 26-38.

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Ragains, P. (1997). Evaluation of academic librarians' instructional performance: Report of a national survey. *Research Strategies*, *15*(3), 159-175.

Appendix 1
PLUS Pretest Key

Objectives:
A. Identify appropriate sources (for example, start research with reference sources and overviews to build context; use trustworthy websites; find substantive, objective articles)
B. Ask a great question that fits the scope of the assignment and requires research and analysis to answer
C. Demonstrate academic integrity by correctly citing sources
D. Use the library's resources and services as part of the research/writing process
E. About/demographic

Questions (correct answer is bold)

1. If you have just found 5 sources for your research paper, what is the best next step to take? **(A)**
   a. **Scan (pre-read) a little bit of what you already have to find out whether you need more information**
   b. Brainstorm new topics in case you want to change your mind
   c. Search for 5-10 more articles
   d. Print everything out
   e. I don't know

2. When should you use a citation in your paper? **(C)**
   a. When you directly quote a passage of less than 40 words
   b. When you restate the author's idea using your own words
   c. When you use a long section in a block quote
   d. **All of the above**
   e. I don't know

3. Which of the following topics is a great idea for a research paper? **(B)**
   a. How has the Cash for Clunkers stimulus program affected the economic well-being of single mothers who lost their homes in Hurricane Katrina?
   b. Cancer
   c. Is communication the key to good management skills?
   d. **Is it ethical to target advertising to very young children in order to build long-term brand loyalty?**
   e. I don't know

4. Your professor has assigned a research paper and part of your grade is to demonstrate critical thinking skills. Which statement below describes the expectations for this assignment? **(B)**
   a. You will find a way to criticize the information you found in your research

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    b. You will use your research as evidence for an analysis of a problem
    c. You will hand in a report on the information you found in your research.
    d. You will use only original ideas – nothing in the paper should come from an outside source.
    e. I don't know

5. Can you cite a web page that does not list an author or date of publication? **(C)**
    a. Yes, move the title to the beginning of the citation and write "(n.d.)" for the date
    b. Yes, you should cite it in your paper but not include a reference list entry for it
    c. No, you have to use sources that have authors and dates
    d. This kind of information is in the public domain and does not need to be cited
    e. I don't know

6. Which of the following is the most authoritative (reliable) source of information for finding key facts about a company? **(A)**
    a. Advertisement paid for by the company's competitor
    b. Mission statement and annual report from the company's website
    c. Press release written by a public relations firm
    d. Article on Wikipedia
    e. I don't know

7. At what point in a project are you most likely to ask for help? **(D)**
    a. Beginning
    b. Middle
    c. Last minute
    d. Never
    e. I don't know

8. Why should you cite your sources? **(C)**
    a. If you don't cite, you're stealing somebody else's words or ideas
    b. So that your professor can find the source of the information you used
    c. Because it is the expectation of the academic community that scholars build on the ideas of others
    d. All of the above
    e. I don't know

9. Imagine that you have been assigned to research an industry. Which option below is NOT a good first step in your research process? **(A)**
    a. Use a library database to find an industry report
    b. Check the library's online reference collection
    c. Look on the library shelves for recent journal articles
    d. Talk to a librarian about how to get started

e.   I don't know

10. You were assigned a 5-7 page research paper and decided to write about the current economic crisis. Which is the best strategy for narrowing your idea down to a manageable topic that fits the assignment? **(B)**
    a.   Use the topic of a Harvard Business Review case study
    b.   The current economic crisis is a manageable topic that does not need to be narrowed down
    c.   Google your topic
    d.   Using what you already know about the topic, brainstorm about the "5 W's": who, what, when, where, and why
    e.   I don't know

11. What is the most important difference between searching for information on Google vs. in the library's databases? **(D)**
    a.   Google always gives you the full text of the resource
    b.   Library databases give you access to in-depth information not available on Google
    c.   Google is better because you will always get more hits
    d.   You don't need to evaluate the information you find in library databases because it is always scholarly
    e.   I don't know

12. How many times during the semester do you get help from a librarian? **(D)**
    a.   Never
    b.   One time
    c.   2-5 times
    d.   More than 5 times
    e.   I don't know

13. Please rate how strong your own research skills are right now. **(E)**
    a.   Excellent
    b.   Good
    c.   Fair
    d.   Poor
    e.   I don't know

14. Do you think that the library and its services contribute to your academic success at GGU? **(E)**
    a.   Yes
    b.   Somewhat
    c.   Maybe
    d.   No
    e.   I don't know

15. Have you had training in how to do research before? Please check all that apply. **(E)**

a. I have taken a credit course on research skills
b. I have taken a class where a librarian made a visit of 1 hour or less
c. I have completed the PLUS program
d. I learned on my own
e. This is new to me

Appendix 2
Rubric for PLUS final research papers

	Didn't Get It	Got It	Got It & Ran With It!
Appropriate Sources	• Uses only one format • Not relevant or authoritative • Heavy reliance on one or two sources	• Uses a range of formats, including reports, articles and websites • Uses only resources presented in class	• Uses a range of formats, including reports, articles and websites • Includes resources only available from the library, but went beyond resources presented in class • Sources are relevant and substantive
Topic Development	• Topic too narrow or too broad for assignment • Uses report format, as a simple statement of facts, missing original analysis	• Research question is of appropriate scope for assignment • Includes original analysis • Question can be answered with resources presented in class	• Uses critical thinking and creative approach to topic, which is of appropriate scope • Research question requires original analysis • Question requires additional sources beyond what was presented in class
Citation	• Errors in APA formatting • Incorrect use of paraphrasing, quotations, or summarizing • Quotes are dumped into paper and not incorporated into analysis • Originality report reveals problems with exact matches	• Consistent APA formatting in-text and reference list • Originality report reveals less than 10% exact match	• APA correctly and consistently used for in-text and reference list citations • Citations are distributed evenly throughout paper, contribute to analysis, and support conclusions

Appendix 3
PLUS Semester Timeline
Updated Spring 2010

Blue = Applied Critical Thinking
Green = Case Study Methods

Week	Assignment/Activity	Librarian Lesson
Week 4	Find articles to support discussion paragraphs (case study)	Brainstorming keywords, advanced search technique, ABI/INFORM & BSC
Week 6	Country research – study questions (case study)	EIU, GMID consumer profiles, country research online guide
Week 6	Country research – followup visit	1:1 search help
Week 8	Industry research – Global positioning presentation (case study)	Review country research, GMID industry profiles, OneSource for Datamonitor industry reports (bonus: IBIS for US & China)
Week 8	Topic development - Research paper (critical thinking)	Goldilocks, 5 W's, advanced search, one-minute methods of topic development; OneSource for company information and news; 1:1 identify possible topics
Week 8	Industry research – followup visit	1:1 search help
Week 9	Topic development – cont.	Student questions on board, group discussion
Week 9	Article searching – Research paper	Getting from question to database search, brainstorming keywords from reading, ABI & BSC; 1:1 help finding sources needed (articles, reports, profiles, etc)
Week 9	SWOT analysis	DataMonitor company reports in BSC, S&P "How To Analyze" reports, Company/org menu choice in ABI; 1:1 help

Appendix 4
Link to online handout

Online handout, with link to presentation slides, are available at the following address:
http://tinyurl.com/carl2010