

Literacy Grant Final Report
Autumn Semester 2014
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Project Summary: This grant was used to integrate an information literacy component into *History 110x: Jesuits in American to 1877*, a first year seminar. This course is part of the University of Scranton's first year seminar program which is designed to introduce first-year students to academic life at the University. With this in mind, Kevin Norris, Library liaison to the department of History, and I developed a series of classroom exercises designed to develop students' information literacy skills. The success of these classroom sessions was measured through a pretest and post-test, as well as application of these skills into a series of subsequent writing assignments, including a major research paper.

Project Timeline:

August 2013: Kevin Norris and I met to discuss the course and student needs, and we developed a plan for two classroom sessions designed to aid students in wading through the sea of historical information available to them. We also developed questions for the student pretest and post test.

Fall 2013: The class met with Prof. Norris in two sessions, the first offered a basic introduction to library research while the second helped to prepare them for this final research paper. The library sessions worked to teach students:

1. The ability to locate historical sources online and within the library.
 - a. Kevin demonstrated the online public catalog at the Weinberg Memorial Library as well as the databases most useful in historical research including "Historical Abstracts," "America: History and Life," "Credo," "ProQuest Central," "JSTOR," and "Historical New York Times."
 - b. Students were also introduced to PLACI EZ-Borrow and interlibrary loan as a means to obtain works that were not available at the University of Scranton.
2. To evaluate the quality and reliability of any given source.
 - a. During the library session Kevin and I discussed with the class how we determine the reliability of different sources. The discussion began with coverage of traditional peer-reviewed journals and monographs and ranged through online sources.
3. To recognize the difference between primary, secondary, and tertiary sources.
 - a. Students were provided with a worksheet which listed various sources and were asked to label each as a primary, secondary, and tertiary source. We then came back together as a class and discussed the rationale behind each answer.
4. To correctly format citations for electronic resources and journals in a bibliography.

- a. Students were introduced to the Chicago formatting style, the style most often used by historians, as well as the EasyBib software.

Following these library sessions students were asked to write a brief reflection paper on where they might find sources for their end of the term research project. The language in these short papers demonstrated a strong understanding of the types of resources available to them as they moved forward. Building on this foundation, students were assigned a research paper on the life of an American Jesuit. In addition to the actual paper students were required to present their findings to their classmates during formal class presentations, which included a discussion of the actual research process.

Assessment:

The pretest was given at the first library session before class began and the post-test in the first class after the library sessions. The pretest and post test included the following questions (results are listed below each question):

1. What is the difference between a primary and secondary source?
 - a. Pretest correct: 29/35
 - b. Post-test correct 32/32
2. Name a database that you might use to find a journal article.
 - a. Pretest correct: 21/35
 - b. Post-test correct 32/32
3. Name one bibliographic style and a discipline that uses that style.
 - a. Pretest correct: 6/35
 - b. Post-test correct 26/32
4. What is the difference between an academic and popular publication?
 - a. Pretest correct: 21/35
 - b. Post-test correct 28/32
5. How do you access the quality of information on a website?
 - a. Pretest correct: 21/35
 - b. Post-test correct 28/32

Analysis of Assessment: In all cases the tests indicate a level of improvement in student knowledge. While a reasonable number of students knew how to define primary and secondary sources coming into these sessions, the library component clearly helped all of the students improve their understanding of the differences in the types of sources. Knowledge of proper citation for historical research witnessed the greatest improvement as a result of these sessions and is a critical component in the development of students writing skills. These tests also suggest a great deal of improvement in student ability to judge the quality of sources. Another indication of the durability of this material was the overall quality of the student's final essays. In almost every case students made strong choices in their selection of sources and offered strong analysis.

Conclusion:

Following the library sessions and through a continued integration of information literacy focused assignments throughout the semester students demonstrated improvement in core information literacy competencies. Students enrolled in History 110x made better and more technical use of library resources, were better able to share discuss their research in writing and in the classroom, and demonstrated a deeper understanding the research process as a whole. I would like to thank Kevin Norris for his assistance in preparing these sessions and for his efforts in presenting them. I would also like to thank the library advisory sub-committee on information literacy for awarding me the literacy grant. My students took a great deal from these sessions and I look forward to doing this again.