The Craft of the Historian (HIST 140)
Information Literacy Grant Report

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Project Summary:
This grant was used to integrate information literacy into HIST 140, The Craft of the Historian, a required research course for sophomore majors. Specifically, the course requires a historiographic paper (5 pages) based on scholarly literature and a primary-source-based research paper (15 pages); together, these papers lay the foundations for research and writing skills in the field of history. Kevin Norris, liaison to the department of history, and I worked together to develop two workshops to provide students with the library and research skills necessary to complete each paper. The success of this collaboration was measured by a pretest and post-test in addition to the papers themselves.

Project Timeline:
Summer 2011: Kevin and I met to revise his library presentation from the year before. We decided to expand to two workshops, corresponding to the times when students would be researching for each paper. The first workshop would focus on secondary research, scheduled for September 28, and the second workshop would focus on obtaining primary sources, scheduled for November 2. Kevin planned to present on using library resources, interlibrary loan, and internet databases. He would also briefly cover intellectual property rights and the different types of scholarly sources—primary, secondary, and tertiary. In my course, I would be sure to cover citation requirements. I developed questions for the pretest/post-test based on the different topics we planned to cover.

Fall 2011: The course was taught integrating these two library sessions and the student research papers. The library sessions proceeded as follows:

Session 1
1. Students took a pretest

2. Kevin provided students with background information on library research:
      a. We discussed how to avoid plagiarism and the meaning of intellectual property.
      b. Kevin explained the differences among primary, secondary, and tertiary sources and demonstrated how to distinguish them in the library catalogue.

3. Kevin introduced students to the concept of locating secondary literature on their topics:
      a. He introduced students to library databases, such as Historical Abstracts, JSTOR, ProQuest, etc.

b. He explained how to use Weinberg Memorial's catalogue to locate books held by the library.

c. He explained how to locate books not housed by Weinberg Memorial using ILL and PACLI.

d. He explained how to enlist a reference librarian's aid.

Session 2

1. Kevin presented information on how to locate primary sources:

a. He introduced students to primary-source databases available through the library, such as American History and Life, Historical New York Times, OAlster, etc.

b. He explained how to use the catalogue to locate primary source books.

c. He explained how to use PALCI and ILL to locate primary sources that cannot be found online or at the library.

d. He explained the benefits and drawbacks of googling primary sources. We discussed Wikipedia as an unreliable source and how to vet wepages for scholarly value.

2. I developed a brief scavenger hunt to help students apply the skills they had just learned to their specific projects.

Assessment:

Following these library sessions, I administered a post-test in class to measure student learning. The results follow below.

1. Pretest correct: 12/12
Post-test correct: 12/12

2. Pretest correct: 2/12
Post-test correct: 10/12

3. Pretest correct: 4/12
Post-test correct: 10/12

4. Pretest: out of 60 possible correct responses, there were 22 errors
Post-test: Out of 60 possible correct responses, there were 12 errors

5. Pretest correct: 12/12
Post-test correct: 12/12

6. Pretest correct: 11/12
Post-test correct: 12/12

7. Pretest correct: 11/12
Post-test correct: 12/12

8. Pretest correct: 10/12

Post-test correct: 12/12

Analysis of Assessment:
In sum, the students' research skills improved significantly because of the opportunity this grant provided for better collaboration between the library and the classroom. Students showed growth in writing and identifying Chicago Manual of Style citations, discerning types of sources, avoiding plagiarism, locating scholarly articles, avoiding Wikipedia as a source, vetting websites for scholarly use, and using the library to locate articles and books not housed in Weinberg Memorial's collections.

Conclusion:
At the end of the semester, I asked students to rate the usefulness of the library sessions 1-5 in an anonymous survey (1 being low, 5 being high), and the majority of students rated the sessions a 4 or 5. Not only did student skills improve, but the students valued the experience of working more closely with the library. Students were encouraged by the fact that they had developed ties to a particular librarian to whom they could come for aid in their research. Further, the two student research projects were largely a success, with students earning from C to A, the median grade being B (quite high for a college class). The library literacy grant was an excellent opportunity for students to deepen their understandings of research and improve their skills. I would like to thank Kevin Norris for his assistance and time, as well as the library advisory subcommittee on information literacy for awarding me the grant.

Note: Please contact Kathryn Meier for specific questions on the pretest/post-test and/or the scavenger hunt.