Health Education: Theory, Research and Practice (CHED 310)

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Project Overview:

This course is taught annually and is one of the core courses of Community Health Education. Students take this class during their junior year at the University of Scranton. The class is designed to provide students with the underlying context and philosophy of health education practice. The class presents an overview of basic principles and foundations of theories and models in their application to the practice of health education and health promotion. It describes the role of theory in the development, implementation, and evaluation of health education materials or health interventions. It also provides an overview of the use of theories at different levels of intervention, strengths and weaknesses of theories, and recommendations for practice based contemporary research. This course includes lectures, classroom discussions and exercises, group presentations, and a theory-based community health intervention project.

I taught the CHED 310 course for the first time during the Fall 2009 semester. Not knowing the information literacy level of my students, I scheduled a library session during the second week of classes to refresh students' memories on the use of databases and websites. At the end of the semester, I learned that one session with a librarian was not enough to produce quality assignments. Therefore, I decided to seek the help of Bonnie Oldham who helped me revise my course syllabus and incorporate specific information literacy exercises into the research assignments. I met with Bonnie Oldham throughout the Spring 2010 and Fall 2010 semester.

Overall Course Objectives

After students have successfully completed this course they will be able to:

1. Explain health education and health behavior change theories
2. Describe the use of health behavior change theories in developing programs
3. Synthesize the health education research
4. Evaluate research findings in the literature
5. Describe the importance of theory to the health education field.

Specific Course Literacy Objectives:

After students have successfully completed this course they will be able to:

- Select a suitable research topic with the appropriate breadth

- Develop a relevant research question for their final project

- Differentiate between popular and scholarly information

- Develop criteria for the evaluation of their sources

- Select the appropriate sources for their different assignments

- Navigate the library's databases and online catalogues to find relevant research materials for their assignments

- Evaluate the contents of different websites

Assignments relevant to improving students' information literacy:

Presentation of a Theory Article:

Students in groups of 1 or 2 will present an application of the behavioral theory within a journal article and lead a class discussion regarding theory use within the article.

Media Critique

Students in groups of 2 or 3 will select a type of media (i.e. movies, television, internet, magazines, music video) to examine issues of body image, sex, drugs/alcohol, and violence. Each group will be allowed 20 minutes to present.

Final Paper/Project

Each student will apply a behavioral theory to a contemporary community health problem, write and present a report to the class (10 – 12 pages double-spaced, with 7-8 references (references are peer reviewed scholarly articles!) cited and listed at end under "References").

In-Class Assignments to Achieve High Levels of Information Literacy

These short in-class assignments were designed to help students succeed in their larger out of class projects.

Different Types of Articles

Students (3 in each group) were given a number of different articles (a review article, a peer-reviewed research article, an editorial, a letter, a newspaper article, etc.) and were asked to characterize each piece of writing. They were asked to identify scholarly work as opposed to popular writing.

This exercise was designed to help students identify articles for their "Theory Article" and their "Final Project" assignment. For both assignments, students were required to find peer-reviewed, scholarly work.

Visit to the Library

As in the previous year, I took this class for a library session with Bonnie Oldham. However, Bonnie Oldham and I decided beforehand that each student would come to class with a specific question relating to health that they would like to research. Students were more focused during this session as compared to the last year's group because they had a specific task.

"Good" versus "Bad" Websites

Students were given several print-outs of websites during class. The goal of this exercise was to teach students that anyone can put information on the internet and that there are ways to establish whether the information is valid or invalid. I asked students to establish criteria for the legitimacy of certain websites. This exercise taught students to be more careful in their use of materials found on the internet and gave them the tools to evaluate health related websites.

Peer-reviewed, Scholarly Articles

I asked students to bring in articles that they thought would be peer reviewed and scholarly. They explained in class how they found the article and how they decided that this article fulfilled the criteria for being peer reviewed and scholarly.

Improvements

I implemented the changes to the syllabus in the fall semester 2010. In comparison to the last year's class, students greatly improved their information literacy.

- All students selected articles for their "Theory Article" assignment that were peer-reviewed and scholarly. Their arguments for choosing the articles were valid.

- Students had much less difficulty locating articles for their final project. While in the previous year I spent a significant amount of time during office hours sifting through stacks of papers with students to determine whether their articles were peer reviewed and scholarly, students now had evaluation tools and used them effectively and with confidence.

- Students were able to evaluate the quality of website contents and applied the established criteria to discern whether a specific site could be used to support their arguments. As opposed to last year's group, these students stayed away from inappropriate sites.

Course Information Literacy Outcomes

- Students improved their research abilities overall

- Students showed improvement in navigating the library's research resources

- Students selected appropriate articles for each assignment

- Students applied their knowledge to evaluate their sources more carefully