EBSCO INFORMATION SERVICES

Customer Success
Case Study

Augustana Faculty Library
University of Alberta
Camrose, Alberta, Canada
Academic Library
EBSCO Customer Since: 1992

"The information literacy 'co-req' concept is all about giving students the information they need at the time they need it. Library faculty are seeing an evolution: students coming in a year after taking one of the courses and asking much more complex research questions than they did prior to taking the course."

Nancy Goebel
Head Librarian
Augustana Faculty Library, University of Alberta

Challenges	Solutions	Benefits
• Help students overcome deficiencies in research and information literacy skills • Assess the effectiveness of information literacy instruction • Promote a discussion about student information literacy in academia	• Librarians and faculty develop the Information Literacy Program course offerings to complement major academic course requirements • WASSAIL assessment tool – a Web-based student assessment survey • Faculty award recognizes information literacy champions • Student award recognizes student commitment to strong academic library-based research • Annual Information Literacy Workshop promotes dialogue in academia	• Highlights librarian/faculty collaboration • Improves student library-based research • Receives favorable student and graduate survey responses and enthusiasm about the program • Promotes dialogue in academia about strategies to improve students' information literacy skills

Overview

In 2001, the librarians and teaching faculty at the Augustana campus of the University of Alberta in Camrose, Alberta, Canada, launched a unique and comprehensive information literacy program to teach undergraduates important information literacy skills. Students learn research skills based on their specific subject majors. Today, the program boasts a suite of 21 courses accompanied by assessment practices, an annual workshop for local teaching faculty and visiting academic librarians to discuss information literacy in the undergraduate context and share best practices, and information literacy awards for students and teaching faculty.

Challenge

The genesis for the program began when Professor Paula Marentette voiced concerns about deficiencies in student research skills for psychology course work. "I was just dismayed with the things that I thought students ought to know how to do but couldn't," she recalls. "Why can't they find these things, why aren't they looking, why are they happy with the first thing they lay their eyes on? That's really what brought me to work with the librarians," she explains. A broader discussion with other professors and the library staff revealed similar observations. Together, the teaching faculty, administration, and library faculty made a collective decision to include information literacy components in the academic curriculum.

Solution

The campus Curriculum Committee, Faculty Council, and the University of Alberta's General Faculties' Council have all formally endorsed the information literacy courses, the foundation of the overall information literacy program. The programmatic initiative would accomplish three important goals: help students build information literacy skills, assess the effectiveness of information literacy instruction, and promote a discussion about undergraduate information literacy in academia.

The program began substantively in 2001, with what Head Librarian Nancy Goebel calls "great support from all constituents -– library faculty, teaching faculty, and administration. They are very receptive to curriculum changes that are the right choices," remembers Goebel.

The academic credit courses in information literacy provide students the best relevant research and information assessment skills for their studies. Students gain information about subject-specific databases, citation guides, and library resources that suit their major courses of academic study, and they learn to conduct quality online research using library catalogues, periodical indexes, and scholarly Web resources.

In the same academic term that students take a discipline-specific information literacy course, they also take another 200-400 level course that requires an assigned paper or library-based research assignment. The latter course is known as a co-requisite or "co-req." For example, a student majoring in music would take the music information literacy course in the same term as a course (the "co-req") from the music curriculum. The research paper topic of the co-req is the topic that the student uses in the information literacy course for its assignments so the student gathers appropriate scholarly periodical, monograph and Web resources and develops a corresponding reference list, which can be used in support of the paper in the co-req course. As a result, the student develops skills and receives academic credit and grades for both courses. Says Goebel, "The co-req concept is all about giving students the information-gathering and

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assessment skills they need at the time they need it." Lisa Hinchliffe, coordinator for information literacy services and instruction at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, explains the practical benefit of the arrangement, saying, "Co-reqs help students see value in the information literacy course. With this model, the theory would tell us that better learning should happen, students should perform better in that disciplinary course, and there should be some synergies there."

University librarians teach the 21 information literacy courses currently offered and collaborate with teaching faculty to develop course content. The arrangement highlights for everyone the teaching role of librarians.

Program Assessment

To continually assess the effectiveness of the program, the Augustana library faculty created a series of information literacy pre- and post-tests for students in the credit information literacy courses. The pre-tests identify for instructors any initial areas of student weakness, which can then be addressed in course planning and instruction. Post-test results are used for comparison to assess progress. Each course is assessed this way and all results are stored in a Web-based .php database known as WASSAIL, which stands for Web-based Augustana Student Survey Assessment of Information Literacy. Launched in 2002, WASSAIL allows instructors to analyze results using test criteria to create student performance reports according to demographics. Goebel explains, "WASSAIL permits us to easily select criteria to generate reports comparing how the same question was responded to in different courses and how it applies across various demographics. For example, we can compare responses for a single question or a group of questions, and we can consider or ignore demographics such as gender, year of study, or course discipline."

<u>Benefits</u>

Goebel points to collaboration as a key to the program's success; "It is successful because of our history of working with faculty." Augustana's Dean Roger Epp furthers the point: "In a very practical way, the curriculum gives meaning to what we say we want to do in preparing students and equipping students to think for themselves."

Each year, the library recognizes a faculty member who demonstrates significant support for information literacy with a special award called the Teaching Faculty Award for the Support of Information Literacy. Undergraduates are eligible for a student information literacy award as well, in the amount of $500, called the Student Award for Library Research. Interested students submit an application that includes a letter of faculty support and a detailed research diary outlining a research strategy, the research process, and a summary of what the student learned.

Signs of success can also be measured by observation and feedback. It has been rewarding for reference librarians to see the differences in student research before and after the courses. "Initially," says Goebel, "students seemed to operate on the assumption that they'd take the course, gain the information, and be done with it. Library faculty are seeing an evolution: students coming in a year later, after the course, and asking much more complex research questions than their peers who have not taken any of the courses." Teaching faculty also note the difference, especially in the improved quality, credibility, and quantity of students' reference lists for research papers.

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One student participant commented, "It changed the way I do research, period." 2006 Augustana graduate Kyle Harland concurs: "The assignments in the information literacy course really prepared me for writing a paper for my course. Learning how to implement Boolean operators and truncation made my research work easier and more effective. Further developing my critical thinking skills by questioning the credibility of resources was a key skill that I developed. Students initially don't think it will be useful, but after the course, everyone is happy that they took it."

Harland was a student library assistant at Augustana, and in 2005, he collaborated with Goebel and a group of 75 Augustana students, teaching faculty, and staff to create a video about the information literacy program. The goal of the video was to provide insight into the library's Information Literacy Program as one model of information literacy integration in the undergraduate curriculum. "It started out as content for a 2006 ALA conference presentation, but became a project for ourselves, too," Goebel notes. Students even volunteered to create a human Information Literacy Program logo in the snow on campus to promote the effort (*below*).
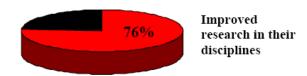
Sharing Success

The program's value and success also inspired the University of Alberta's Augustana Library to host professional development workshops relating to information literacy. Held first in 2001, the workshop presents opportunities to discuss strategies about information literacy and library instruction. "In Canada, there's a lack of organized conversation about information literacy among academic librarians," says Goebel. "We decided to bring in speakers to address timely issues and work together to share what's helpful for other universities." The annual event has become a forum for library and faculty sharing and draws attendees from across North America.

Excerpts from Instruction Summary Statistics

2006 Student/Graduate Information Literacy Survey

Of the students and graduates who responded to the survey:

76% felt their subject-specific Information Literacy course improved their research in that discipline area a large or very large amount

76%

Improved research in their disciplines

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86% felt their Information Literacy course helped them a large or very large amount to locate and access periodical literature

86%

Helped locate & access sources

80% felt their Information Literacy course helped them a large or very large amount to evaluate and select the most relevant and quality periodical literature

80%

Helped select quality sources

Excerpted with permission from:

Augustana students volunteered to form the letters of the
Augustana Information Literacy "People Logo" *above* -– by lying in the snow.