

# Becoming a Campus Assessment Leader Collaborating for Campuswide IL Assessment

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Opportunities often come when they are least expected. However, placing oneself in a position that will help to create the desired opportunity, or make it easier to capitalize on the opportunity when it does appear, is essential. This brief paper will describe the opportunity which led to the creation of an information literacy assessment survey at Arcadia University. It will discuss the creation and development of that survey through a partnership between campus administration and the library. Finally, it will briefly go into detail about some lessons learned during the initial year of the assessment project. While this paper does not offer a formal review of assessment results, due to the long term nature of the assessment project, it is hoped that the description of the project and the lessons learned will help other librarians to consider the opportunities that may be created within their own campus communities which could lead to the development of a similar survey, one that is produced and distributed in partnership with members of campus administration, and one which functions to increase the profile of the library and to help show the library's value to the campus community.

In the spring of 2011 I had been serving on my university's Undergraduate Curriculum Assessment Committee for two years. As the information literacy librarian, I initially volunteered for the committee so that I could learn more about assessment, while at the same time hoping to increase the profile of the library and to educate more faculty about the importance of information literacy. Information literacy had not been included as a curricular goal when the new un-

dergraduate curriculum had been formed several year previously, and a librarian had not been assigned to be a member of the curriculum committee itself. So, when the call came out asking for people interested in serving on the assessment committee for the new curriculum, I jumped on the chance to connect myself in some small way to the program.

The first few years of my work on that committee passed rather uneventfully. Aside from seeking the advice of the committee regarding some in house information literacy assessment projects that the library was conducting, there had not been much opportunity for me to do a lot to advocate for the library and information literacy. However, two events happened to change this condition of stasis. First, the committee underwent a change in leadership. The old director of assessment retired, and the Associate Provost for Faculty Advancement and Student Learning took his place as head of this committee. Second, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, our region's accrediting body, issued their report which found that our university was lacking in the area of assessment. The University was assigned a brief review period, after which we would be required to provide Middle States with a report on our progress. This meant that the Associate Provost was responsible for providing evidence of significant and ongoing assessment at our university within a very short time period. Here was the opportunity that I had been waiting for.

Because of my presence on that committee, and because of the conversations that I engaged in with members of the committee about the library's infor-

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mation literacy assessment efforts, the Associate Provost approached me about partnering to conduct a wide ranging formal information literacy assessment project. The Associate Provost's idea was to develop a survey which could quickly and efficiently be given out to students in several campus departments. The survey would require a minimum of faculty involvement, thus increasing our chances of obtaining faculty participation, and it would be designed to focus on assessing the information literacy skills of students in both 200 level Research Writing courses and in Senior Capstone courses. These courses, which were integral parts of the university's new undergraduate curriculum, had long been targeted by the library as potential venues for information literacy instruction because of their focus on research. Furthermore, these two courses were connected in a fundamental way, as Research Writing was considered by many faculty members to be a course which functioned to prepare students for their Senior Capstone research experience. While the information literacy survey would be useful over the short term in helping to support the need for library participation in these courses, and in helping librarians and faculty to adjust library workshops for classes where these partnerships were already occurring, the long term goal of this assessment project would be to show a change over time in student information literacy learning from the sophomore to the senior year.

### Survey Development and Revision

The survey instrument was developed by the Associate Provost and myself. It was divided into two sections. Section one was designed to provide easily tabulated quantitative data, while the second section was qualitative in nature and designed to ascertain how students conceptualized research and their research process. It was our experience that faculty members often preferred looking at either quantitative or qualitative data. This may be traced back to the fact that different disciplines view data very differently, or, it might simply be a result of individual preference. However, we hoped that if faculty had information made available to them in different formats, that it would increase the likelihood that they would be able to find value in the survey data. Appendix A includes an example assessment form, but the survey will also be described in more detail below.

The survey was also designed to be very similar for each discipline that we distributed it to, though we

always told departments and faculty that they could add questions to the survey if they desired to do so. In practice, few faculty chose to modify the survey. Finally, survey questions were revised after the first year of the project based on conversations with members of the curriculum assessment team who helped assess the survey data. Efforts were made to limit the number of changes to the questions so that we could still use data from the first year of the survey, however in practice this was not always possible.

The quantitative section of the survey consists of several parts. Part one asks students to indicate specific research behaviors that they have engaged in during the course, and how many times they have engaged in those behaviors, such as talking with a librarian, using interlibrary loan, and using a reference management software system. Part two asks students about the resources they have consulted during their research for the course, be it Google, or a discipline specific library database, and also how frequently they used those resources. Part three asks students to agree or disagree with statements that describe aspects of the research process, such as evaluating sources, and mining source bibliographies to find additional information. A fourth section was added to the survey during its second year asking students how many times they used specific database search tools or search strategies while conducting research for the course, such as using quotations around words or phrases, and the use of subject term keywords. Included in all of these questions are some less desirable or less likely answers. These were included to make students think more closely about their survey answers. After the first round of assessment a few items were also added to individual sections of the survey. For example, a question was added to the agree/disagree section of the survey asking students if they made an effort to obtain articles on Interlibrary Loan, or if they only used what was available full text in the library.

The qualitative section of the survey contains 5-6 reflective questions asking students to conceptualize their research process at a metacognitive level. Students were asked to talk about their research and search processes, and to discuss how they evaluated and choose which articles they would use in their research papers. This section was also the one which was revised the most heavily, as the assessment committee learned that students did not always answer the question that we thought we had asked. As a result, the phrasing on

most questions in this section was reworked at least slightly, and a few questions were also removed from the survey all together. For example, a question asking students about their search strategy was removed in favor of adding quantitative questions asking students how often they used specific named search strategies. A question asking students how they determined when they were done researching was also removed after faculty on the assessment committee determined that most students, even at the senior capstone level, would likely not be able to provide the committee with a sophisticated answer to this question.

### Survey Distribution

During the first year of the project (2011-12) the survey was distributed to the Communications, Sociology, and Historical and Political Studies departments. The second year saw the addition of the English and Biology departments to the project, giving the assessment a well-rounded and representative sample of disciplines. Departments were targeted for this assessment largely based on the anticipated ease of working with the faculty member teaching the course. For example, the Associate Provost was a member of the sociology department, and as a result was able to ask for their participation in the assessment project. Historical and Political Studies was chosen because that was a department that I had a good working relationship with, having in the past conducted several information literacy workshops for their research writing course. Biology and English were added in the second year of the assessment project because members of the curriculum assessment committee were from these departments and had started to themselves teach the research writing courses in their discipline.

Because of the labor intensive nature of assessing the qualitative data in the survey, it was not considered practical to distribute the survey to too many departments. The number of departments that we could distribute the survey to was also limited in a few other ways. Several departments, such as modern languages and philosophy, were not large enough to have their own research writing or senior capstone courses. Several other departments, such as Business and some of the Science and Art disciplines also did not have a research based senior capstone project, so their coursework did not necessarily line up with the questions we were asking in the survey.

The actual process of distributing the survey and collecting data was relatively simple. Each semester the Associate Provost or I would approach the relevant course instructors. In our conversations with the faculty member we would stress the fact that the survey would take only about 20 minutes of class time for students to complete. We asked to distribute the survey to students at the end of the semester close to the date when any final research projects would have been completed by students. We also stressed the fact that the information collected would not be used to judge or assess faculty. Marketing the survey specifically as an *information literacy* assessment tool also helped to allay faculty fears in this regard. Because we sought approval from the university's Institutional Review Board before distributing the study, a cover sheet was required as part of the project, explaining the study and its purpose to students. The cover letter also informed students that the survey should be completed anonymously, and that it was completely voluntary. When introducing the survey to students we also specifically stressed the idea that the survey would be used to help improve instruction for future students.

### Thoughts on Initial Assessment Results

Several years of data will be necessary before we are ready to approach answering the survey's long term goal of determining change over time in information literacy learning. In 2014 we will begin to be able to address this issue when the same group of students who took the survey in their Research Writing finish their Senior Capstone projects and take the survey again. However, information and conclusions can be drawn much more quickly from the survey to help improve library and information literacy instruction in each individual course in which the survey is distributed. For example, subject librarians can view the survey and determine if students are using specific databases or research strategies that the librarian feels are especially important. If few students turn out to be using these tools according to the survey, librarians can then specifically modify their instruction the next time the class is taught to increase the emphasis they place in these areas. The librarian will then be able to use the survey data from the new semester to see if there has been any change in student response based on their modified instruction session.

In addition to the targeted ways that librarians can use the survey to make changes to their instruction sessions, there have also been several broader themes that emerged when the surveys for each of the courses which participated in the initial round of the project were considered as a whole. Looking at results from the quantitative section of the survey, one very encouraging piece of information that we found was that in all three disciplines students showed that they used the Academic Search Premier database very heavily. Over 80% of students used this database while completing their course research projects. Furthermore, the use of the database exceeded the use of the free web in two out of the three disciplines surveyed.<sup>1</sup> These numbers support the fact that our targeting of first year students in English 101 courses for Information Literacy instruction is beneficial. Our primary goal in English 101 courses is to introduce students to the Academic Search Premier database, and these results show that upper level students are familiar and comfortable with this database, as they continue to use it heavily throughout their college career.

The answers received from the first round of qualitative questions are also illuminating, if in a slightly different way. The curriculum assessment committee reviewed the qualitative results and had a discussion about what ideas could be drawn from the answers students gave. To many on the committee, it appeared that students did not always understand what information we are asking for, and that the problem might be one of terminology. Students did not seem to understand what was meant by the “research process” or that when we asked about their “search strategy” we were looking for more than simply a listing of databases and resources used. It was suggested by a faculty member on that committee that librarians might want work on collaborating with faculty to introduce these terms to students during instruction, so that students would understand the terms better, but also so that we could more explicitly focus on helping students to increase their metacognitive understanding about academic research. It was also suggested that including reflective activities ” into the library workshop which ask students to begin to formulate their conception of the “research process” might be one way to go about this.

### **Difficulties/Lessons Learned**

While this assessment project is far from complete- in

fact I would say that it is just beginning- there are some lessons that can already be drawn from the process. Thinking back, it would have been helpful to pilot test the survey with just one department for a semester before trying to collect data from multiple disciplines. The assessment that the curriculum assessment committee conducted resulted in several changes to the survey, more than would be ideal in some cases to keep that data consistent from year to year. Bringing subject librarians into the survey development and assessment process at an earlier date would also be ideal. While the plan is to include librarians in future assessment efforts, the curriculum assessment committee conducted the first round of assessment with me as the only library representative. Having the discipline librarian’s perspective on the survey and its results will be valuable, because they would be ideal individuals to discuss the survey results with faculty. This is likely to be important as faculty did not always seem sure what to do with the data we sent them initially, perhaps due to their busy schedules. Having librarian digest and summarize the data for faculty, while suggesting changes that can be made to information literacy instruction in the course, will be a valuable way to begin close the assessment loop.

More problematic, but perhaps not surprising, is that students did not always seem to take the survey seriously. Questions were often left blank, particularly in the qualitative section of the survey, or answers written by students often appeared to be brief and rushed. While the survey was meant to be distributed with minimal faculty involvement, having a faculty member present while students complete survey, and having that faculty member speak to students about the importance of the survey, seemed to help in one case to motivate students so spend a bit more time answering the questions in a thoughtful manner.

My final piece of advice has to do with the administration of the assessment project. As with any joint project, figuring out roles and, more specifically, determining which partner will be responsible for keeping track of the assessment data that collected is very important. There was some confusion about this initially which resulted in some data being mislaid. As of the time I am writing this paper, we are still looking to find a few lost sets of data, and unfortunately the loss of this information may delay the date when we can expect to obtain results relating to the long term goals of the project.

*\*\*\*As a result of this survey project the library has participated as a presenter in a campus wide assessment workshop, and initial information about the survey has already been distributed to faculty working with the new curriculum. This collaborative effort between the library, the administration, and the faculty who allowed us to disseminate the survey in their classes, shows how well libraries are positioned through our Information Literacy efforts to be ideal assessment partners, and to even be assessment leaders on campus.*

## Appendix A. Information Acquisition Survey- Research Writing

Historical and Political Studies  
Fall 2012

**In your process of identifying and obtaining appropriate sources for assignments in this course, how often, if at all, did you do the following:**

	Never	Once	Twice	Several times
Consult with my professor				
Consult with a reference librarian				
Consult with a classmate				
Consult with a friend not in the course				
Consult with the Writing Center				
Review your class notes				
Re-read all or part of a class reading				
Review the Assignment Sheet				
Consult sample student work				
Request material from Interlibrary Loan				
Looked up citation styles on the Library website				
Messaged a librarian				
Used a video tutorial on the library website				
Used the Find a Journal or Find a Citation link on the library's website.				
Used Endnote, Zotero, or another reference management software				

**When you were searching for sources to complete the assignments in this course, how often, if at all, did you utilize the following resources:**

	Never	Once	Twice	Several times
Landman Library- History/International Studies Resource Page				
Google or other web search engine (e.g.: Yahoo)				
Google Scholar				
Google News				
Google Books				
Wikipedia				
Academic Search Premier				
Omni Select				

Library Catalog				
World Cat				
Jstor				
SAGE				
Anthrosource				
CIAO				
Taylor and Francis: Politics, IR and Security				
Web of Knowledge				
Lexis Nexis				
Other:				

**How often did you use the following search tools/functions when searching for information?**

	Never	Once	Twice	Several
The advanced search page of the database				
Subject Terms or Keywords Suggested by the Database				
Limit your search by date				
Limit your search by publication type				
Limit your search by full text				
Search for keyword terms specifically in the abstract				
Search for keyword terms specifically in the title				
Put phrases in quotations				
Used "or" to search for synonyms				
Used truncation (*)				
Searched the database's thesaurus				

**Indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about your process of choosing the sources you used to complete the assignments in this course:**

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
My goal was to find the minimum number of sources as quickly as possible.				
I wanted to find out the range of possible sources first before choosing the ones to include in the assignments.				
I read through each source carefully before including it in an assignment.				
I completed the assignments based on one or two sources and listed others that looked right, but I did not really use these sources.				
I would search through the citations of references in the first sources I found trying to locate more appropriate sources to complete the assignments.				
I skimmed each source before including it in the assignment.				

I chose the first sources I found.				
I found it very difficult to find appropriate sources for the assignments.				
I would still find it very difficult to find appropriate sources for this kind of assignment				
Assessing the legitimacy of a source was important to me.				
I identified useful articles in databases, but did not use them because they were not available full text.				
I felt comfortable assessing the legitimacy of my sources.				
I had difficulty identifying appropriate search terms.				
I was unsure of what an appropriate source was for this assignment at first.				
I am still unsure of what an appropriate source would be for this kind of assignment				
I have applied the lessons I learned about identifying and locating sources in this course to help me complete assignments in other courses.				
This assignment helped me change the way I approach locating and assessing sources for other projects.				
I took steps to retrieve all useful articles, even those not available full text in the library's databases.				

**Please write a paragraph or two reflecting on the following questions as they apply to your research process for this course.**

1. Describe the steps in your research process?
2. How did you use research to focus your topic(s)
3. How did you develop your search terms while conducting research in this course?
4. How did you pick the sources you chose to use for the assignments in this course?
5. How do you define a legitimate and reliable source?

**Notes**

1. The discipline in which this did not occur was Communications. However, the assignments in that course specifically encouraged them to use free web resources.