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Creating an Information Literacy Course in Hospitality and Tourism Management: A Case Study

Information literacy courses for credit are a long-term goal for many libraries. Some libraries are able to achieve this with active information literacy programs supported by a team of librarians and departmental faculty approval. However information literacy programs are normally aimed at catching a wide array of freshmen and are not commonly part of a particular major or program. This was the case at Purdue University where a library credit class known as General Studies 175 was created to provide information literacy and research skills to a range of Purdue undergraduates.

In 2008, a professor in the Hospitality and Tourism department at Purdue entered a course proposal for an information literacy class that would be required of all incoming HTM majors (freshmen and transfer students). The professor (Dr. LaLopa) felt a sense of frustration with the lack of research skills the junior and senior HTM students were displaying. He understood that the goal of many HTM students was to gain employment upon graduation, and that because of the work-applied focus of the program, many students felt that writing research papers was not important.

The Hospitality and Tourism program is ranked number one overall for comparable programs in the country. Graduates will go on to become managers and entrepreneurs in the field of Hospitality and Tourism. Some will go on to graduate school either in HTM or in Business.

Dr. LaLopa saw the need for research inquiry and critical thinking skills to be formally incorporated in the beginning of the HTM program in order to show students the importance of these skills for furthering their career prospects and overall lifelong learning skills. Dr. LaLopa's idea was to create a one-credit course that would be required for all students. The librarians from the Management Library (HTM shared this library) would teach this class in 8-week terms during both fall and spring semester.

When I started working at Purdue's Management Library, I became responsible for a liaison role with the HTM department and I understood that I would be taking charge of creating and teaching a one-credit information literacy class using the GS 175 course title but aimed at the

HTM students. Fortunately, besides working closely with Dr. LaLopa, I had a librarian collaborator who had taught many information literacy embedded courses previously and the three of us would be able to bring together ideas for how this course would be shaped.

Immediately we decided that this course, while having a library resource based component, would be tailored to the future assignments students would have (ex: case studies, marketing proposals, team work). The course would start with an overall introduction to information literacy inquiry and research, but would also incorporate research specific to business and HTM. We wanted the takeaways to be lifelong learning skills the students could apply in many areas of their life and good preparation for their employment in the HTM industry.

The main challenge we faced in creating this course was the time constraints since the class only met twice a week for fifty minutes over eight weeks. Another challenge was making sure that the students were kept engaged in the class and that the assignments were a culmination of the different areas that we were going to cover. My librarian colleague and I decided that lecture would be limited and hands on exercises would make up most of the class time. Group work was required for some assignments since teamwork was required in almost all of their major classes.

Technology was also a huge component of the class. Fortunately we were able to teach this class in a state-of-the-art Learn Lab at the Management Library. The classroom was a collaborative space with three screens on each side (students did not face forward) and smart technology along with white boards and camera capture technology. The classroom was intended for group work, collaboration, and creative learning. What made this unique for us was that we had to learn how to teach in this brand new space along with teaching a first-time course with mainly freshmen students for the first eight weeks. We knew that the first impression the freshmen HTM students would have of their program would be this class and our teaching, so we knew it was important the class be engaging, creative, and relevant.

One team-based assignment that we created incorporated all of the takeaways we were hoping students would gain. This was the persona assignment. The students were divided up into six teams (normally 25 students in the class) and were assigned a persona. A persona was a chance for the students to pretend they were making managerial decisions based on an area of the HTM industry. For example, we had students who were part of a marketing team for a cruise ship address the issue of bad media coverage about cruise ship problems (flu, terrorism etc.). The assignment gave the students a real-to-life scenario and the results they had to produce were based on their research (articles, books, web sites, etc.) into how would they address or possibly resolve the issue. This incorporated critical thinking skills, various informational viewpoints on a topic, and even marketing/management research and data skills. The persona assignment was the most challenging for the students, but overall the feedback the students gave about this assignment was it was fun, relevant, and opened their eyes to various ways of looking at information.

The final project we assigned was another chance for students to work on a topic in the HTM industry. This assignment was individually based and the students chose a topic from a pre-approved list that was a topic of interest to them on a professional level. This is where we incorporated a social technology in the learning process. Instead of writing a paper, the students would research a topic, compile a list of relevant and high quality resources (13-15), write a summary about their information inquiry experience, and produce their work as a web page. The tool we used in class was Netvibes. Netvibes allowed the students to create a free account, add content into widgets, and organize the content in the way they felt it should be displayed. Additionally we required a bibliographic list of citations in APA style. Then the students would present their final project, a chance for them to articulate their information inquiry skills.

After the first semester, we assessed the course and sections. Overall the feedback the students gave was that the class did benefit them in locating resources and learning about appropriate information and helped them articulate their professional goals. The negative feedback we received was mainly about the pace of the class and frustration with using Netvibes.

Overall the GS 175 course had a significant impact for the HTM department and the libraries. Student success, faculty collaboration, and innovative technology were all factors that played a role in the continuation of the course. In 2010, a Food Science information literacy class was created along with a class for Krannert business students.