Information Literacy and First Year Students: Evaluating Knowledge, Needs, and Instruction

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The Ethnographic Research in Illinois Academic Libraries Project

- Two year research study using ethnographic methodology
- Library Services and Technology Act Grant, Illinois State Library
- Illinois Wesleyan University
  Northeastern Illinois University
  University of Illinois Springfield
  University of Illinois Chicago
  DePaul University
The ERIAL Project – IWU Team

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The ERIAL Project - Goals

• Gain a better understanding of undergraduates’ research processes

• Assess the role of academic libraries and librarians

• Adjust library resources and services accordingly

• Mixed-methods approach
Illinois Wesleyan University

- Private, residential, undergraduate liberal arts school
- 59% female and 41% male
- 6% international, 76% white and 24% ALANA
- Graduation rate of 83%
- Retention rate of 90% for first year students

Gateway Course

• Required of all first-year students

• Small, discussion-oriented

• Critical thinking

• Writing skills

• Information literacy instruction is optional
The Information Literate Student

1. Determines the nature and extent of information needed
2. Accesses needed information effectively and efficiently
3. Evaluates information and its sources critically
4. Uses information effectively
5. Understands economic, legal, and social issues; accesses and uses information ethically and legally

ACRL Standards: http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency.cfm#stan
Pre-Test / Post-Test Design

• Modified: Information Competency Exam, Bay Area Community Colleges Information Competency Assessment Project

• 26 questions and demographic survey

• 20-25 minutes

• Measured four of the five standards

• Voluntary
Pre-Test / Post-Test Findings

• 21 classes participated, roughly 2/3 of the 32 Gateway courses offered fall 2009

• 15 classes participated in library information sessions

• 273 students pre-test, 272 students post-test

• 53% of IWU’s 2009-2010 first-year enrollment

• Mean score:
  – Pre-test 17.64 (67.8%)
  – Post-test 18.36 (70.6%)
Pre-test / Post-Test Findings

• ACRL Standard 1 (determine need):
  – 79% post-test

• Standard 2 (access)
  – 62% post-test

• Standard 3 (evaluation)
  – 82% post-test

• Standard 5 (ethical use)
  – 66% post-test
Pre-test / Post-Test Self-Ratings

On a 0 – 10 scale, self-ratings:

• Locating information:
  – 65% between 6 and 8, pre-test
  – 73% between 6 and 8, post-test
  – 81% self-rated 6 and 10, post-test

• Evaluating information:
  – 65% between 6 and 8, pre-test
  – 69% between 6 and 8, post-test
Pre-test / Post-Test Patterns

• Citations
  • 9.5% of students answered all four questions correctly on the pre-test
  • 14.5% on the post-test

• Ethical issues
  • copyright

• Evaluating
  • Primary vs. secondary sources

• Organization of information
Research Process Interviews

- Retrospective research interview
- Research process interview
  - 19 students participated
  - 30-45 minutes
  - 70 unique searches; 117 search strings
- 3 of 19 reasonably well-executed
- 48 specific problems / 6 areas
Research Process Findings

- Selection of database
- Search strategy
- Citations
- Evaluation
- Locating physical items
- Technical
Observations

• Seeking assistance

• Source preference

• Complex process / multiple steps

• Mechanics of searching

• Library vs. internet
Observations

- Giving up easily
- Benefit of instruction
- Getting by / assignment focus
- Link to critical thinking
Potential Next Steps

• Adjusting library instruction

• Formally integrating info lit into Gateway

• Info literacy pre-test

• Working with teaching faculty / assignments

• On-going search observations
Questions?

- The ERIAL Project
  - www.iwu.edu/library/erial