Can’t Fight This Feeling:
Research Process Reflection & Instruction Impact

Erica England & Erin Hvizdak – Washington State University Libraries

Background

- Spring 2018: Erin runs a trial workshop with capstone students; faculty member suggests giving workshop to instructors, as they often forget their students’ struggles with research.
- This “forgetfulness” is common in librarian-run workshops with new English comp instructors. Proposed assignments were also beyond students’ learning level.
- Fall 2018: First-Year Composition instructors hold weekly professional development workshops; we were invited to run this workshop.
- Unique position on campus because we help students with research across disciplines, identities, and statuses.
- Sounding board for students’ frustrations with course projects.
- We can be a valuable resource in terms of advocating for student needs on a more affective or emotional level.
- Librarians can use first-hand experience to help instructors create assessments that more holistically take into account learning styles, research anxieties, and development levels of students.

Workshop & Participants

GOAL: For instructors to better understand what their students may be experiencing when trying to learn new research skills by mapping the research process & discussing their feelings at each stage.

- 30 total participants, 19 agreed to participate in interview portion

Why Librarians?

- Unique position on campus because we help students with research across disciplines, identities, and statuses.
- Sounding board for students’ frustrations with course projects.
- We can be a valuable resource in terms of advocating for student needs on a more affective or emotional level.
- Librarians can use first-hand experience to help instructors create assessments that more holistically take into account learning styles, research anxieties, and development levels of students.

A Few Takeaways

- Many workshop participants plan to incorporate more reflection & discussion about research into class design.
- Some used it as a decompression tool at the end of the semester.
- Many participants didn’t realize how their peers may be struggling with different aspects of research.
- Many instructors had not realized how different their peers’ research interests were from their own.
- This workshop helped instructors become more aware of how students may struggle at different stages of research.

Select Interview Responses

Did you discover any feelings that surprised you? How might this impact your course design and also how you interact with students?

I was surprised to find that my own feelings about research work were the opposite of many of my peers. It will be good for me to be aware of other perspectives on the project, particularly the feeling of being overwhelmed. I’ll do my best to break the project into smaller, more easily completed parts.

-- Male, New Instructor

I would maybe have this be a midterm type in-class exploration to help students express their frustrations as well as strengths, and give me some more ideas about what we need from our library sessions.

-- Female, Seasoned Instructor

Would you be interested in, or are you now planning to, incorporate a workshop like this into your own classroom to see where your students may be struggling?

I have a colleague who likes to say “You have to teach the students you have - not the student you were, the students you used to have, or the students you’d like to have” - this was a good reminder of a new place to consider this advice.

-- Female, Seasoned Instructor

Completed Research Maps

Do you think that your own anxieties OR favorite parts of research come into play when designing your course (e.g. assignments, lectures, etc.) How might this bias be detrimental to student learning?

I was surprised to find that my own feelings about research work were the opposite of many of my peers. It will be good for me to be aware of other perspectives on the project, particularly the feeling of being overwhelmed. I’ll do my best to break the project into smaller, more easily completed parts.

-- Male, New Instructor

Would you be interested in, or are you now planning to, incorporate a workshop like this into your own classroom to see where your students may be struggling?

I would maybe have this be a midterm type in-class exploration to help students express their frustrations as well as strengths, and give me some more ideas about what we need from our library sessions.

-- Female, Seasoned Instructor

I have a colleague who likes to say “You have to teach the students you have - not the student you were, the students you used to have, or the students you’d like to have” - this was a good reminder of a new place to consider this advice.

-- Female, Seasoned Instructor

Select Interview Responses

Completed Research Maps
Can’t Fight This Feeling: Research Process Reflection & Instruction Impact

Background
- Spring 2018: Erin runs a workshop with students in a capstone course that asked them to get into small groups & use emojis to map out their feelings during the research process, in order to better understand their personal barriers to learning. A present faculty member suggested that it would be useful to run with instructors, as they often forget what their students are going through.

- This “forgetfulness” was noted during workshops that librarians run each year with new English composition instructors. Librarians found that the instructors’ proposed assignments often went beyond what we felt was appropriate for students’ learning level.

- Rather than “telling” them, we wanted them to better understand for themselves what their students might be experiencing when trying to learn new research skills, so we ran this same workshop with both new & experienced composition instructors.

Workshop & Participants
- A workshop was held with the English department’s Professional Development Course, which includes all English composition instructors, both new & seasoned.

- The workshop presented background on library anxiety, and then asked participants to form small groups to try to map out the research process. Attendees were then asked to utilize pre-printed emojis to express their feelings at each stage.

- There were 30 total participants in the workshop: 20 seasoned instructors that have taught English composition for at least one academic year, and 10 that would be teaching for the first time in Spring 2019.

- Of the 30 participants, 19 agreed to participate in the study: 14 women & 5 men, including 11 seasoned instructors & 9 instructors with no former teaching experience.

Why Librarians?
- Public service & instructional librarians are in a unique position on campus because they help students with research across disciplines, identities, and statuses in school.

- Librarians notice patterns between students’ developmental stage & their feelings and anxieties regarding research; and because librarians do not grade students, we become a sounding board for their frustrations with course projects.

- Because of this, librarians can be a valuable resource in terms of advocating for student needs on a more affective or emotional level.

A Few Takeaways
Implications for assessment:
- Librarians can use their first-hand experience with student emotions & anxieties to help instructors create assessments that more holistically take into account learning styles, research anxieties, and developmental levels of their students.

- Allowing instructors to reflect on their own emotions in the research process can raise awareness that the “one size fits all” approach to assignments must also take into account a multitude of other factors.

Future plans & directions:
- Continue analyzing interview responses & look more closely at how this might impact instructors based on experience.

- Interview participants to discover how this impacted their actual assignments & interactions with their students.

- Pay more attention to the conversations that workshop participants are having during group time, with less focus on the final posters that groups create. It is important to arrange participants into small groups rather than having them work individually so that negotiation & learning comes from others.

- Develop a workshop that can be easily tailored & used across the library profession & in other disciplines.

Erica England
First-Year Experience Librarian
erica.england@wsu.edu

Erin Hvizdak
Reference & Instruction Librarian
erin.hvizdak@wsu.edu