Engaging library collections as a path toward lifelong learning

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INTRODUCTIONS

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- ➔ Katie Hassman
  - ◆ Undergraduate Engagement Librarian, University of Iowa Libraries
  - ◆ Library liaison to Department of Rhetoric
- ➔ What we do together
  - ◆ Support students' information literacy learning and development of critical thinking

THE RHETORIC ASSIGNMENT

- Mapping a controversy from three points of view
  - Understand issues beyond the pro-con spectrum
  - Apply basic but essential research skills
  - Apply basic critical analysis of arguments
- The gap in literature
- The final essay never met our desired learning outcomes
- Without a specific topic, students were conceiving of public issues as items on a list of possible topics and were left to Google "marijuana good" / "marijuana bad," trapping them on the pro-con spectrum
- We had to ask ourselves: What did we really want to do with this assignment?

FROM SOLVING A PROBLEM TO THE ASPIRATIONAL

- Started as a typical information literacy/Rhetoric collaboration about how to get students to develop more nuanced topics
- Became a larger conversation about how topic development relates to
  - Students' reading endurance, synthesis and citation habits (Carlozzi, 2018; Asher, 2015; Hinchcliffe, et al 2018)
  - Students equate relevance with quality (Hinchcliffe; Asher)
  - Students need media literacy (Caulfield, 2016) and to build trust in the media (boyd, 2017; 2018) before they can determine what is and isn't trustworthy or credible

Robinson, Marilynne. (2016). Save our public universities. Harper's, 332(1990), pp. 29-37.

"The assumption, now current, that the test of a university is its success in vaulting graduates into the upper tiers of wealth and status, obscures the fact that the United States is an enormous country, and that many of its best and brightest may prefer a modest life in Maine or South Dakota. Or in Iowa, as I find myself obliged to say from time to time…

"If it seems to be failing now, that may be because we have forgotten what the university is for, why the libraries are built like cathedrals… They are a tribute and an invitation to the young, who can and should make the world new, out of the unmapped and unbounded resource of their minds."

Marovich, Pete. Getty Images. Digital image. Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jul/06/marilynne-robinson-interview-barack-obama-donald-trump-writer-theologian

REVISED RHETORIC ASSIGNMENT

- Pre-Perch
    - Colin checked out fifty magazines!
    - Two fifty-minute browsing and reading sessions
    - Assignment introduction and topic selection happened concurrently
    - Research and Discovery Worksheet Process
    - Media literacy as a component was crucial
    - Digital searching was incorporated as a follow-up
    - The library database finally worked in our favor
    - Realized we needed a home
- The Perch Hatched!

ASSESSMENT

Methodology:

- Class observations and post-assignment focus groups (Fall 2019)
  - Observed: 9 RHET:1030 sections (approximately 20 students each)
  - Focus groups: 5 RHET:1030 sections (approximately 20 students each)
    - Focus groups led by Library and Information Science graduate student and librarian/instructor team during scheduled class meeting times
    - Open ended questions + moderated conversation
      - Topic selection/development
      - Discovery of multiple perspectives on an issue
      - Student news consumption habits and practices

STUDENTS ON TOPIC SELECTION

"I always choose something I already have knowledge on so it makes it easier, but didn't do that this time. Because we went to the library, I found something I thought was interesting and said, 'I'm going to read more about this because I want to know about this.' It was a little bit more work because I had to do more background research to understand, but because I thought the whole discussion was more interesting, it wasn't hard to make myself do it. It wasn't repetitive."

"There's a lot of controversies in these magazines I've never even heard of—not just abortion and gun control."

"I would use The Perch for assignments in the future. **Online you don't know where to start.** This helped make topic development easier."

STUDENTS ON TOPIC SELECTION

"The variety of topics was helpful because, if we were just told to do this assignment and look online, I would have just done something I knew about. But because I was looking at new things, I found **so** many things that I didn't know about."

"It also really exposed me to new kinds of sources, and I liked that my physical reading was limited. Even if I didn't choose those topics, I went back and searched for things I found interesting after those days to just read more about it."

STUDENTS ON CONFIDENCE

"Choosing a new topic was a little more work because of background research, but I would produce something more quality because I had to do more work."

"I agree that it was more work and that it was also beneficial to the learning process because I didn't have opinions and I looked at sources that disagreed more since I was starting from scratch. I think that made it a lot harder to write, because I was less confident in what I was saying and there could have been other angles that I wasn't aware of. I was able to push myself more…when I was done, I was so happy, but now I know that I can write about stuff that I don't totally know about."

STUDENTS ON SHIFTING TOPICS

"We've learned that it's okay to not do what you originally had."

"Yeah! I spent, like, three hours trying to find an article saying 'Gerrymandering is good and there's nothing wrong with it at all.' But that article didn't exist. So, I had to, like, broaden what I was searching for, and I found an article that gerrymandering is **used** in the wrong way, but it in its essence isn't **wrong**. But it was so frustrating at first trying to find what I was looking for. So, in the future, I'll think like, 'Maybe just think about it from a different perspective!'"

STUDENTS ON CREDIBILITY & TRUST

"Makes topic development easier because you don't have to worry about credibility - what is interesting AND is it credible? You can just look at what is interesting."

"Because we knew we could trust that the instructors and librarians picked them out. We had a list of things that we knew would work. Knew that things were usable because they were handpicked by instructors and librarians."

Remarked about discovering that magazines had recurring topical sections

Now is the time for questions and feedback!

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