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Encouragement as Service Philosophy: Motivating African-American College Students to Connect with Library Resources and Services

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Encouragement as Service Philosophy: Motivating African-American College Students to Connect with Library Resources and Services

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Bennett College at a Glance

- All-female, historically black college in Greensboro, NC
- ~725 undergraduate FTEs (Fall 2009)
- Many first-generation students
- First-year challenges:
  - Limited library/research experience
  - Internet-dependent
  - Research anxiety
  - Widespread Plagiarism
Library Use in Transition

- **Library Use 2006-2007**
  - ~11 bibliographic instruction sessions (AY 2006-2007)
  - 14,661 patron count (Fall 2007)
  - 288 reference interviews (Fall 2007)
  - 6,550 item views in NCLive (AY 2006-2007)

- **Library Use 2009-2010**
  - ~90 course-integrated sessions (AY 2009-2010)
  - 25,911 patron count (Fall 2009)
  - 790 reference interviews (Fall 2009)
  - 57,135 item views in NCLive (Fall 2009-Jan 2010)
Connecting Students with Resources and Services

- Instructional Services
  - Faculty outreach, training, & recruitment
  - Drop-in workshops for students
  - Coordination of instructional content & pedagogy with Carol Kuhlthau’s “information search process”

- Reference and Customer Services
  - Electronic resources, web presence, & support materials
  - Student programs & marketing

- Comprehensive instructional and programmatic emphasis on fostering students’ perception of encouragement
“Encourage” Defined

- Per the *American Heritage® Dictionary*:
  - To inspire with hope, courage, or confidence; hearten.
  - To give support to; foster.
  - To stimulate; spur.

- Encouragement as Service Challenge and Philosophy:
  To shape library resources and services—including instruction, reference, and general customer service—in support of *heartening* students; *fostering* their interest in, and enthusiasm for, their research; and *spurring* them to persevere in the face of substantial scholarly tasks.
Encouragement as Service Philosophy

Itinerary:

- Theoretical and empirical basis for emphasizing student encouragement
- Strategies for instruction
- Strategies for reference
- Coordination of services
- Experiences at Bennett College
Faculty Encouragement & Academic Self-Concept

- Kevin Cokley (2003), “What do we know about the motivation of African American students?”
- Academic self-concept defined as “how a student views his or her academic ability when compared with other students” (p. 529)
- Reviewed empirical research on the motivation of African Americans to see what factors contributed to positive academic self-concept.
- Noted that many conclusions of previous research based on anecdotes rather than data.
- Built on previous research that found that good relationships with faculty were the strongest predictors of students’ academic achievement.
Goal of the study: “develop a cohesive motivational theory of psychology for African Americans” using self-determination theory and attribution theory.

Self-determination theory: examines the reasons why individuals engage in or avoid activities and focuses on the basic human needs of autonomy, belonging, and competence.

Attribution theory: sees individuals as naive scientists who try to understand the reasons things happen as they do.
Faculty Encouragement & Academic Self-Concept

- Aim: to recapture the social and contextual factors that many models of motivation do not include.
- Cokley’s theoretical model predicts that faculty encouragement will promote positive academic self-concept.
- Self-report of 687 students at 2 HBCUs and 1 PWCU.
- Results: African Americans at HBCUs in this sample show more intrinsic motivation, more academic confidence, and more positive feelings toward faculty than African Americans at PWCU.
- In analysis, faculty encouragement as a variable became the most powerful predictor of positive academic self-concept among African-American students.
Libraries as Promoters of, and Contributors to, Students’ Academic Self-Concept and Motivation

- “Educators of African American students should never underestimate the power of encouragement, as it serves as an important component of student-faculty interaction and speaks to the quality of the student-faculty relationship.” (Cokley, 2003, p. 553).

- Awareness of the “linkage between perception of faculty encouragement and academic self-concept provides librarians with a powerful tool for fostering motivation among African-American college students.” (Mortimore & Wall, 2009, p. 37).
Strategies for Encouragement: Instruction

- Emphasize relationships, not resources.
  - Student—Librarian
  - Librarian—Professor

- Address research anxiety early and often.
  - Name students’ anxiety and empathize—make yourself the example.
  - Acknowledge process-oriented challenges (e.g., refining topic) and students’ attending feelings.
Strategies for Encouragement: Instruction

- Know the syllabus and assignment(s), and engage research tasks as one who is responsible for completing them.
- Model processes and practices, especially with regard to “pre-focus exploration” and “focus formulation”.
- Emphasize strategies for identifying keywords, revising search strategies, and knowing when to move on.
- Model good responses to search failure and don’t “bullet-proof” your presentations.
# Strategies for Encouragement: Kuhlthau’s Information Search Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISP Stage</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>Thoughts</th>
<th>Actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Task Initiation</td>
<td>Prepare to Choose Topic</td>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>Ambiguity</td>
<td>Seeking Relevant Information</td>
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<td>2. Topic Selection</td>
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<td>3. Prefocus Exploration</td>
<td>Seek Focus Through Initial Information Gathering</td>
<td>Confusion, Frustration, Doubt</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Focus Formulation</td>
<td>Find Focus</td>
<td>Clarity</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Information Collection</td>
<td>Collect Focused Information</td>
<td>Sense of Direction / Confidence</td>
<td></td>
<td>Seeking Pertinent Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Search Closure</td>
<td>Conclude Information Gathering</td>
<td>Relief</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Starting Writing</td>
<td>Produce Paper or Project</td>
<td>Satisfaction or Dissatisfaction</td>
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## Strategies for Encouragement: Translating the Information Search Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISP Stage</th>
<th>Session Translation</th>
<th>Feelings Addressed</th>
<th>Session Topic</th>
<th>Resources Covered</th>
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<tr>
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<td>General vs. Subject</td>
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<td>3. Prefocus Exploration</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Focus Formulation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Clarity</td>
<td>Periodical vs. Book</td>
<td>Example Websites</td>
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<td>5. Information Collection</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Evaluating Websites</td>
<td>Plagiarism Helps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Search Closure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plagiarism</td>
<td>Citation Style Helps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Starting Writing</td>
<td>Putting It All Together</td>
<td></td>
<td>Citation Style</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategies for Encouragement: Reference

- Consistently communicate enthusiasm (even jealousy) for the research task.
- Elicit how the student feels about the task, her level of interest and commitment, and her confidence with the subject matter.
- Acknowledge and respond to confusion, anxiety, and disinterest.
- Clarify the topic and weigh potential foci.
- Identify ambiguity in the assignment and encourage the student to seek clarification.
- Question the student’s choices.
Strategies for Encouragement: Reference

- Similar to instruction, model research processes and practices, and emphasize strategies for identifying keywords, revising search strategies, and knowing when to move on.
- Focus on what the student should do following the interview.
- During the interview, resist the temptation to “produce the source.”
- However, when possible, follow up with potential resources after the interview.
Strategies for Encouragement: Coordination of Services

- All service points are involved.
- Anticipate, listen for, and name student information needs without being asked.
- Emphasize personal relationships. Don’t pass students off or pass them around.
- Walk students to reference and make the introduction.
- Connect students with the librarians who met with their classes.
- Show willingness to support and participate in research tasks from beginning to end.
Experiences at Bennett: Faculty Feedback

Faculty Post-Instruction Survey, Fall 2009:

- 100% - Students displayed more confidence in their research.
- 85% - Students produced better or more refined topics.
- 100% - Students used the Internet better or more appropriately.
- 77% - Student work showed less evidence of plagiarism.
Experiences at Bennett: Student Feedback

Student Satisfaction Survey, Fall 2009:

- 92% - More confident with their research.
- 93% - More confident finding books and articles.
- 94% - More confident using the Internet for research.
- 90% - More confident using a citation style.
References


