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Institutionalizing Information Literacy

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INSTITUTIONALIZING INFORMATION LITERACY

Kim L. Ranger

Abstract of Session

"Locating, evaluating, and using information effectively" are skill goals in Grand Valley State University's General Education Program required to be met in each course that has received a General Education designation. This paper will discuss what led to this inclusion, partnerships formed and projects begun as a result of the mandate, and the move toward meeting information literacy within the majors as well as within the General Education program.

Background

Grand Valley State (GVSU) is a public, regional, comprehensive university. It is housed on two primary campuses eleven miles apart: Grand Rapids and Allendale, Michigan, with a smaller campus in Holland, and 86 off-campus sites. There are currently about 19,000 students enrolled in a mixture of undergraduate liberal arts and graduate professional programs. All degree-seeking undergraduates complete a developmental General Education (Gen Ed) program. The librarians are twelve-month faculty and serve on all major governance committees.

I was the Government Documents Librarian for ten years. Though I did library instruction, I never had any interest in teaching until 1998, when I think I had a conversion experience! I also realized that I was burned out in Documents and planned a sabbatical. There was a strong bibliographic instruction program already in place when I left for my sabbatical in 1999. Students

in the Freshman Studies classes completed a self-guided library tour with questions. Librarians worked with the freshman composition program in a variety of ways to help students learn the basic skills necessary to write a required essay with outside sources for their portfolios. Over the years, we had used workbooks, a video developed in-house, lecture/demonstration, and a Web-based tutorial. The semester before I went on sabbatical, I team-taught one of the composition sections and realized that students also learn many information technology skills in this course. Librarians also did quite a bit of upper-level and graduate library instruction across the curriculum and served a growing number of distance education courses.

Sabbatical

I went on sabbatical to Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in Brisbane, Australia to study information literacy set in the larger teaching and learning context. I spent five months reading; studying QUT's information literacy program; shadowing the Information Literacy Coordinator, Judy Peacock; co-coordinating the creation of a Web-based tutorial; working at the reference desk; attending workshops and conferences; and writing a draft information literacy plan for GVSU. I was captivated by the ideas Christine Bruce expressed in her book, *The Seven Faces of Information Literacy*. When Judy told me that Christine worked at QUT and asked if I wanted to have lunch with her, I was able to question her about her ideas and the practical application of them.

While I was at QUT, GVSU was developing a new General Education program (For more information, see <http://www.gvsu.edu/gen-ed/Newprogr.htm>.) The struc-

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ture of the new General Education Program is designed to acquaint students with the following areas of knowledge:

1. The major areas of human investigation and accomplishment—specifically, the arts, the humanities, the mathematical sciences, the natural sciences, and the social sciences;
2. An understanding of one's own culture as well as other cultures;
3. The tradition of humane inquiry that informs moral and ethical choices.

The Gen Ed program is also designed to help students develop the following academic and life skills:

1. To engage in articulate expression through effective writing and speaking;
2. To think critically and creatively;
3. To locate, evaluate, and use information effectively; and
4. To integrate different areas of knowledge and view ideas from multiple perspectives.

Kathryn Waggoner, our Electronic Resources Coordinator, is on the Gen Ed committee (a subcommittee of the University Curriculum Committee) and made the argument to include skill #3: to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively.

A university-wide information literacy task force attended the ACRL Conference-within-a-Conference on Information Literacy in 1999, partly since the newly revised Gen Ed program required teaching information literacy skills in every Gen Ed class. The information literacy task force proposed the creation of a Web-based tutorial to serve as a model of one way to teach the new requirement. The History department expressed an interest in this pilot project.

History Tutorial

When I returned to GVSU in the new position of Information Literacy Coordinator, the task force had decided to create an interactive, discipline-based Web tutorial on information literacy for the American Civilization course in history. We successfully applied for an internal grant from the Faculty Teaching & Learning Center for \$11,000. Two faculty from history; the Electronic Resources Coordinator, Kathryn Waggoner;

an instructional designer from Information Technology; and I worked on the tutorial during Spring and Summer terms and completed the project in time for the beginning of Fall semester 2000.

Process

We worked as a team to incorporate principles from history, information literacy, and Web design to make something that we considered both educationally sound and visually interesting. When it debuted, the tutorial was unique in that information literacy was defined **in terms of history as a discipline, in history as a field of knowledge**. Tony Travis, one of the two history faculty who worked on the project, wrote that my greatest contribution to the project was my ability to provide translation from librarian talk to historical talk so that the historians could understand that despite different words and sometimes different concepts, we were committed to the same goals through the same means.

We designed units that include objectives, mini-lectures, activities, and self-scoring quizzes, all of which could be used independently throughout the semester. We included suggestions for assignments and we hoped to include best practice examples as appendices. We believed students could benefit most from this tutorial when the lessons and themes were integrated into regular classroom discussions and activities. Some of the tutorial assignments called for students to bring what they learned to class for discussion.

Although designed sequentially, the sections can be used as stand-alone units. We did not expect the students to complete the tutorial in a single session but to use it throughout the semester. Some instructors may want to substitute lectures, activities, or assignments of their own in place of some of the tutorial units. We expect them to supplement our tutorial with their own ideas—e.g., definitions of history. We did not try to make the content comprehensive.

This tutorial tries to help students "do" history by having them read, analyze, and evaluate primary and secondary documents and by helping them build narratives based on historical evidence.

Assessment

For assessment purposes, we asked the instructors to keep a brief diary/journal/log of how they used the tutorial, improvements or additions they would like to see, what was especially useful in the tutorial, and how the students responded to the tutorial. In addition, we asked to be sent copies of a few sample graded or scored assignments or essays from their classes, with names

of the students deleted. However, only one history professor has really collaborated with us. She has had her students use the pre- and post-tests, provided us with sample papers, and has suggested several improvements to the tutorial, which we gladly incorporated.

Publicity

Publicity was built into the grant requirements. I posted a message to BI-L, mentioned the tutorial in a presentation on GVSU's participation in the "PREMIER" program on information literacy at the Michigan Library Association Annual Conference, and posted a message to the MLABI (Michigan Library Association Library Instruction Round Table) electronic discussion group. The tutorial was added to the LOEX Clearinghouse for Library Instruction Web pages under "Instruction Links: Tutorials" (<http://www.emich.edu/public/loex/ISLINKS/TUTLINKS.HTM>), and I authored an article in the Winter 2000 issue of the *LOEX News*.

Conclusion

We hope that the tutorial will support and supplement content, that it will serve as a model for other GVSU courses, and, further, that this project will serve as a template for the development of future discipline-based information literacy instruction in higher education.

The Next Step

The history department received another internal grant to coordinate assessment of the history content and revise the pre- and post-tests. The department had received feedback that their sections had too much text and not enough active learning, for instance. The new grant was meant to help our two departments continue as working partners, lessen the pressure on me to do all the assessment, and relieve Kathryn Waggoner of some of the responsibility for revision of the html coding. Information Technology had agreed to copy portions of the tutorial to the history Web site for the History department to make changes. We were to retain control of the Library sections, the front entrance, and the table of contents. However, this new project has not been completed, and the scope has changed considerably.

It can be difficult to get the departments to claim ownership of information literacy, assert ourselves as experts on information literacy, and maintain the integrity of intellectual property, all at the same time.

Other Projects

The Library faculty also decided to participate in the PREMIER program (Promoting Research Education in Michigan: In-service Educational Resources). Volunteer librarians from other Michigan academic institutions led a workshop on information literacy for GVSU's Winter 2000 Faculty Teaching Conference, which was well-attended and received. The agenda included definitions and standards, an example of one college's classroom/library faculty collaboration, and group work on good assignments. The workshop gave credibility to information literacy and provided a good launching point for further change.

After that workshop, the Gen Ed Subcommittee surveyed departments on information literacy. After reading the survey responses, I organized two workshops on "Information Literacy in the Disciplines" for the Fall 2000 Teaching Conference, with five classroom faculty defining information literacy concepts and demonstrating ways of meeting information literacy competencies in various fields (international business, public & nonprofit administration, psychology, liberal studies, geology, and history, where I presented the history tutorial).

Having heard Linda Shirato give a presentation on cyberplagiarism at the Michigan Library Association Annual Conference in the Fall, I invited her to present a cyberplagiarism workshop at our Winter 2001 Faculty Teaching & Learning Conference. She graciously accepted, and the workshop received excellent evaluations. This allowed me to attend some workshops instead of presenting, yet still have information literacy prominent in the conference.

At the upcoming January 2002 Teaching Conference on "Internationalizing the Curriculum," there will be two workshops by librarians: one on "3 Ways (and More) the Library Can Help with Internationalizing Your Classes" by a team of librarians, and the other on "Information Literacy from Australia to Allendale."

Partnerships

Two of the presenters for the "Information Literacy in the Disciplines" workshops, both also on the Gen Ed Subcommittee, had been initially resistant to the "imposition" of information literacy on the faculty at the beginning of Fall 1999. One, a Geology professor, had argued vehemently against it; and the other, in Liberal Studies, wavered—not consistently supportive or unsupportive. They have since made a 180-degree turn, and both are supportive of and knowledgeable about information literacy.

At present, there are at least two disciplines creating plans for meeting information literacy in the major.

The same Geology professor is proposing a new course that would be required for freshmen or sophomore majors. I am working with the School of Nursing to define a "scope and sequence" of information literacy in nursing. Many faculty in the disciplines work with library faculty liaisons to improve assignments, learn how to incorporate information literacy into their classes, and/or have library instruction included as part of the course. I am in the process of creating a survey asking how instructors incorporate information literacy into their classes. One of the difficulties for the librarians, though, is that we are very short-staffed: our total librarian to student ratio is 1:1200. Our library faculty to classroom faculty ratio is about 1:33. Not every librarian teaches classes (although all do teach one-on-one at the reference desk and in other kinds of settings, such as workshops and conferences). We have fifteen full-time, tenured or tenure-track library faculty, one half-time, one visitor (who works at a research institute), and four three-quarter-time adjuncts. Although all the tenure-track library faculty members are supposed to teach classes in their liaison areas, only thirteen of us really do the classroom teaching. Many of the librarians are uncomfortable in a classroom teaching situation. Some are resistant to learning new ways of teaching, and others simply have their own agenda. The questions I ask myself repeatedly are: How do we pull together a core of people committed to teaching? How do we manage the demand for live instruction versus the number of teacher librarians? How do we handle burnout? How do we arrive at new ways of teaching and learn the skills necessary to achieve this? Many of us attend the Faculty Teaching and Learning Center workshops and conferences. I organized a library faculty retreat in the Spring of 2000, in which we focused on the types of questions to ask classroom faculty when preparing to do library instruction—i.e., requesting a syllabus, course Web pages, specific assignments, grading criteria, and so on. Our next retreat focused on communication styles, conflict management, and strategic planning. I also met with some of the Library faculty about using small groups for active, cooperative learning in single-time sessions and creating assignments within assignments to facilitate that. I believe we are making some progress, and yet there is much room for growth! Another issue that concerns me is the general escalation in class size at GVSU—there are labs on campus that hold up to forty people, but we have classes of fifty and more students.

Other Indicators

There are several departments that include information literacy in their assessment plans and reports (which

are part of both a university-wide mandate and the North Central Association accrediting requirements).

New course proposals for Gen Ed now include a statement on how information literacy skills will be met. Those without it are remanded and the proposal authors are referred to the information literacy Web pages "for ideas on how to meet the information literacy goal."

Librarians are members of every major faculty governance committee, which I hope increases classroom faculty awareness of library faculty as teachers. I myself am on the Faculty Teaching and Learning Center Advisory Committee and the University Assessment Committee. We are eligible for university-wide Teaching Excellence awards and have a divisional Teaching Excellence award. (We have given two awards to exceptional librarian-teachers so far—which come with \$500 from the Faculty Teaching and Learning Center).

Our self-guided tour for Freshman Studies is now a virtual tour, made possible with the help of our university Webmaster. The virtual tour is still a requirement, of course, and I am planning virtual tours of other GVSU Library sites.

One of new GVSU instructional designers (in Information Technology) is a librarian!

I think our goals are to have instructors consult with library faculty to design good assignments and instruction, whether they do instruction themselves, use an online tour or tutorial, or have a librarian do the instruction; to provide for a variety of learning AND teaching styles—i.e., to provide for the various ways in which people experience information literacy; to have departments/schools define information literacy within their disciplines and share ownership of information literacy with us; and for us, as librarians, to know/understand/be able to talk the language of the disciplines and be familiar with the teaching tools used, such as Blackboard CourseInfo.

Conclusion

This is one case study—a case in which we are trying many different ideas at once and, I think, succeeding, on the whole.

URLS:

Grand Valley State University: <http://www.gvsu.edu/>

GVSU Library: <http://www.gvsu.edu/library/>

GVSU Information Literacy: <http://www4.gvsu.edu/infolit/>

GVSU General Education Program: <http://www.gvsu.edu/gen-ed/Newprogr.htm>

GVSU History 103 (American Civilization) Research Tutorial: <http://www.gvsu.edu/library/History/Title.htm>.

Queensland University of Technology Library: <http://wwwlib.qut.edu.au/>

LOEX: <http://www.emich.edu/public/loex/ISLINKS/TUTLINKS.HTM>
