Library Research Basics Online: A Review

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Library Research Basics Online (LRBO) was created by the Fenwick Library Reference Department in response to the demand for additional library instruction by the Composition Program, specifically ENG 101. During the Fall Semester Mason has over 100 sections of ENG 101 and the University Libraries are unable to provide a librarian for a face-to-face library orientation for that many sections. The Fenwick Library Reference Department does provide Site Seeing at Fenwick which includes a tour of the building and a 20 minute introduction to library resources. Site Seeing is scheduled for specific times during the fall and students are encouraged to “drop-in”. During Fall 2006 about 15 sections of ENG 101 took advantage of the Site Seeing Program but the Fenwick Library Reference Department wanted to reach more students. A number of options were considered but ultimately a orientation to research based in WebCT was selected as the best approach.

The purpose of LRBO is to provide students with the information resources, sources, and basic skills to complete a research assignment. The learning objectives were based on the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education and the Objectives for Information Literacy Instruction: A Model Statement for Academic Librarians. The objectives include:

- Students will select the most appropriate retrieval sources for the information required.
- Students will construct and implement an effectively designed search strategy
- Students will evaluate the information retrieved
- Students will provide complete citations for the information retrieved
The target audience for LRBO initially was the ENG 101 students. Over the course of the past year all levels of students at Mason have taken advantage of the program, especially the Assignment Calculator.

Fenwick Library Reference Department designed LRBO to be used as a “just-in-time” source for a specific piece of information. Problem-based learning is the pedagogical model LRBO most closely resembles. It allows the student ownership over the learning, assumes no prior knowledge of library skills, promotes self-directed learning, promotes real-world learning, and supports recursive and iterative cycling of the process. (Dabbagh & Bannan-Ritland, 2005). Unfortunately because there is no opportunity for collaboration or reflection LRBO can not be considered a constructivist learning environment.

WebCT was chosen as the appropriate delivery method of the learning environment because the Fenwick Library Reference Department felt that it could reach the most students this way. Most classes here at Mason already have a WebCT component and this allows the faculty to link directly to LRBO and not force the students to another resource. A stand alone website was considered but the Fenwick Library Reference Department felt that would remove LRBO from the class. The Fenwick Library Reference Department hoped that LRBO would become integrated into the research assignments and not become a “busy-work” assignment.

The resources provided were created by the Fenwick Library Reference Department or other University Libraries across the country. All resources were used with permission by the University Library that created the tool or resource. LRBO is organized into 11 sections, The Assignment Calculator, Information Cycle, Identify & Develop a Topic,
Find Background Sources, Find Books & Media, Find Articles, Use Internet Sources
Wisely, Evaluate What you Find, Cite Your Sources, Avoid Plagiarism, and A Research Record. Each section includes weblinks, pdfs, word documents or flash videos that provide students assistance with each area of the research process. Also from LRBO students can contact a librarian by IM or email. Students are also encouraged to come to the Fenwick Library Reference Desk for additional assistance.

Because LRBO is encouraged to be incorporated into a course there is no option for assessment by the Fenwick Library Reference Department. The Research Record provides students a place to organize the research process and to evaluate the information retrieved. It is up to the instructor of the course to require to students to complete the Research Record and to grade it. The Fenwick Library Reference Department does not have a way to assess how students are using LRBO or if it is successful without talking to the instructors who assign the Research Record.

LRBO explains the basic steps in the resources process and provides students the necessary tools to successfully complete the project.
References

http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/informationliteracycompetency.htm

http://www.ala.org/ala/acrl/acrlstandards/objectivesinformation.htm