Abstract

In many cases the first and only introduction to the library that any college student receives is in the freshman English class, on this campus called English 101. The traditional instruction students receive consist of a 50 minute lecture performed by a librarian at a specific time during the semester with the occasional addition of a tools-based workbook. With the creation of the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (ACRL Standards) many librarians are trying to move beyond this tool-based approach. An information literate student will be able to identify his or her information needs, create an appropriate search strategy, evaluate the information found, use the information in an ethical manner and produce the expected outcome from the research. By using the information literacy model students will be able to create better research papers for their classes.

Introduction

Information is everywhere; on TV, on the computer, on public buses. As students are entering institutions of higher education they are well indoctrinated into the “information age”. More students bring computers with them to campus and are proficient in “searching” the web (O’Hanlon, 2002). Because of this most students and faculty think the students are information literate.

The “Googlification” of research is a problem at all levels of academia. Students either don’t know other resources exist or are happy to use what is convenient. In the past, before online databases, this phenomena did exist, but students did have to come
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into the library to use the print indexes such as Psychological Abstracts or the MLA Bibliography. At that time students may have chosen the first five articles that the library owned and wrote their paper around them. In most cases, the articles would have been scholarly resources. Now students have access to thousands of resources at the click of a mouse. Students use a search engine such as Google or Yahoo, find the first five websites that look helpful and write about what they find. At no time could these resources be guaranteed to be scholarly.

Faculty are increasingly frustrated that students aren’t using “appropriate resources” and in some cases of over reaction ban students from using any online or web based resources. Also as resources have expanded they are often confused as to what is a “researchable” topic (Gilchrist, 2004). As more and more libraries are moving to web-based interfaces for the traditional journal indexes and purchasing more and more journal titles only online this leads to confusion and frustration for the student. Information needs to be evaluated for more than a format

Since the nineteenth century librarians have been responsible for teaching people how to use the information sources available. In the early 1970s the term bibliographic instruction was created by the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Bibliographic Instruction Section (BIS) by the organizers of the section to identify what it is that they do (Bopp & Smith, 2001). Bibliographic instruction has been used for over 30 years to define a program of instruction librarians use to teach library resources to college students. Specific examples of bibliographic instruction are drop-in classes on a specific library research tool, such as the library catalog, or class related
instruction, demonstrating what tools the library has to offer to assist in the successful completion of class assignments. In many cases the only formal introduction college students have to the library is in the freshman composition course to help the students complete the standard research paper assignment. Librarians refer to this as the 50 minute BI.

The concept of information literacy was widely introduced to librarians with the publication in 1989 of *Information Literacy: Revolution in the Library* by Breivik and Gee, well before the current explosion of the world wide web. Now with the explosion of the Internet, instruction librarians have turned to their work as the guide for moving beyond the 50 minute BI.

In 2000 ACRL, using the model put forth in Breivik and Gee, published *The ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (ACRL Standards), followed a year later by *Objectives for Information Literacy Instruction: A Model Statement for Academic Librarians* (ACRL Objectives). The ACRL Objectives gives librarians concrete examples of behavior students need to achieve to meet the ACRL Standards. The five standards of information literacy are defined as:

1. The information literate student defines and articulates the need for information.
2. The information literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently.
3. The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.
4. The information literate student, individually or as a member of a group, uses information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose.
5. The information literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.
Needless to say the ARCL Standards would be impossible to meet in the 50 minute BI or by a librarian only. A new approach would need to be taken including the elements of the 50 minute BI, active learning techniques and increased collaboration with faculty.

With the move towards an information literacy model librarians still have to contend with the students belief that they know where and how to search for information. Also, faculty believe that students are information literate in part because faculty believe they themselves are information literate (Breivik & Gee, 1989). Allowing the librarian ample class time to teach the necessary skills is a struggle with faculty balancing their teaching needs. This study will demonstrate the additional time taken to include the information literacy model in an English freshman composition class instead of the traditional 50 minute BI will increase the use of scholarly resources by the students and in turn students will write better papers.

Literature Review

As stated earlier most students think they have all the necessary research skills to conduct college level research. Using a library skills test that measured students lower level information seeking skills such as reading call numbers and selecting an appropriate journal index to find a subject specific articles, students over estimated their library search skills. Maughan states that “students think they know more about accessing information and conducting library research than they are able to demonstrate when put to the test.” (Maughan, 2001). If we are to move beyond
assessing these lower level skills we must partner with faculty in incorporating information literacy into the curriculum is another conclusion from this survey.

Additional evidence about student’s perceived research skills comes from O’Hanlon. “Students almost always overestimate their abilities. Computer literacy cannot be assumed for students” (O’Hanlon, 2002). The term information fluency is used in this study to combine both computer literacy, the use of applications such as Microsoft Word, email systems, and Internet browsers and information literacy. O’Hanlon found that most students were very computer literate. But the more computer literate they were the less information literate they were. Basic search concepts such as Boolean logic were unfamiliar to many of the students.

As students matriculate they believe that their information literacy skills continue to grow was found in a study by Whitmire. Using data collected from a campus student satisfaction survey they ranked variables such as class year and academic ranking with the students own self-reported information literacy skills. The strongest correlation between information literacy skills was with students who also found the library facilities very good. If students think well of the library they will think well of their research skills.

A focus group conducted by Seamus of first year students studied how students find and use information. Most students don’t view the library as a part of the information network (Seamus, 2002). Students find the vast choices of information overwhelming but don’t look to the library as a source to help manage the information overload. Also, as long as students can find some form of information they are happy
and not ready to evaluate what it is that they are using. If the web page is “eye-catching and well put together” that it is done by a professional (Seamus, 2002).

Even if students are satisfied with the library instruction they receive they don’t value what was learned nor find it valuable to recommend the instruction to a friend. Gutierrez and Wang conducted a study comparing two different mediums for library instruction, a print workbook and an online workbook and while the online workbook was found to be much easier to use, students still found it an unnecessary exercise. Unless the library instruction is conducted at the point of need students are not going to find any instruction useful.

At the University of New Mexico, Emmons and Martin detail a complete reworking of the freshman English composition class. Using the ACRL Standards they reworked the 50 minute BI into a more active learning session and outside of the library session the students completed a specific tool-based tutorial. At the end of the semester the library collects the students research portfolios, containing two revised papers. Using a detailed rubric librarians reviewed the papers and found that students did use more scholarly journal articles, although books remain the most highly used resource.

One of the strongest ways to impress upon students the need for information literacy skills is to make it a priority with the faculty. In a study by Black, Crest and Volland detailing faculty collaboration faculty found that the instruction sessions benefited their students (Black, Crest, & Volland, 2001). Using a two pronged approach of building relationships and specific departmental faculty development for information
literacy the librarians were able to increase faculty awareness of information literacy and the instructional resources available in the library.

Method of Research

To test the hypothesis that students will create better bibliographies for a research paper using the information literacy model two different sections of freshman English composition (English 101) will be used. If a student in either section receives additional formal library instruction in another class, such as, Communication 100, University 100 or a Western Civilization course he or she will be removed from the study.

One section (Group 1) will receive the traditional 50 minute BI class with no additional library treatment. They will be asked to complete the traditional 5 page research paper using 5 sources, 3 of which must be a scholarly journal article.

The second class (Group 2) will also be asked to complete a research paper with the same requirements. Group 2 will receive in class and out of class library assignments focusing on what is information and evaluating information effectively, and in class discussions focusing on ACRL Standard One, defining the information need. Group 2 will also receive a library lecture focused on ACRL Standard Two, accessing information effectively.

Effective collaboration with the faculty member for Group 2 will be vital to the success of the study. The flow of the information literacy components need to be
integrated into the curriculum in an organic manner. Not something that was just an add on or the students will not understand how it all fits with the curriculum.

The assignments will be spaced out during the final 2/3rds of the semester of English 101. Once the professor assigns the research paper students will be asked to select a broad topic area, such as civil rights or fashion. Students will then be assigned to review a subject specific encyclopedia located in the University Libraries Reference Collection to help narrow the topic into a specific area. Journal articles from popular sources such as *Time* magazine could also be consulted. Once the topic is manageable such as the civil rights march in Montgomery or how television influences the fashion industry, students can start looking for sources.

At this time, an in class assignment about evaluating information will be given to Group 2. Students will be divided into groups and given a popular magazine or a scholarly journal and asked to evaluate it. Questions will include, who is the author of the article, what are the author’s qualifications, where does the author work, who is the intended audience of the article, are there statistics, are there references, is the information current.

An out of class assignment will ask students to review an assigned website. Using similar evaluative criteria each student will be asked to evaluate a website, such as www.cnn.com, www.time.com, www.nih.gov, www.census.gov. Also included in with the reputable websites will be some that include false or bad information such as www.martinlutherking.org which is sponsored by a white supremacist organization.
The research process log will be a very detailed report turned in with the final research paper. Elements of the log will include where the student searched, the different search terms used and how many results were found with the different keyword combinations. Also a part will ask students to explain why they used specific pieces of information and to include citations to articles they chose not to include as sources for the research paper and why they chose not to use them. It is hoped that with this requirement students will move beyond picking the first five articles they come too in the library databases.

To evaluate the students’ bibliographies a rubric will be created to rank the sources following the model used by Emmons and Martin. Sources will be ranked using the variables of relevance or significance of the article, the credibility of the article and the students engagement of the article. Once the articles are ranked a statistical analysis will be run to prove the correlation between the information literacy instruction and the use of better sources.

It is expected that with the additional information provided by both the librarian and the faculty member that the students will create a better research paper. It is also expected that students will recognize that their information literacy skills were not adequate in meeting the demands of college level research and that the library has a place in the research process. It is not expected that students will replace Google with the library but that they recognize when each is appropriate.
References


