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Expanding Our Embrace: Enhancing Information Literacy and Composition Skills for Adult Learners. A Case Study at the College of New Rochelle During Spring 2012

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TITLE: Expanding Our Embrace: Enhancing Information Literacy and Composition Skills for Adult Learners – Case Study at the College of New Rochelle during Spring 2012

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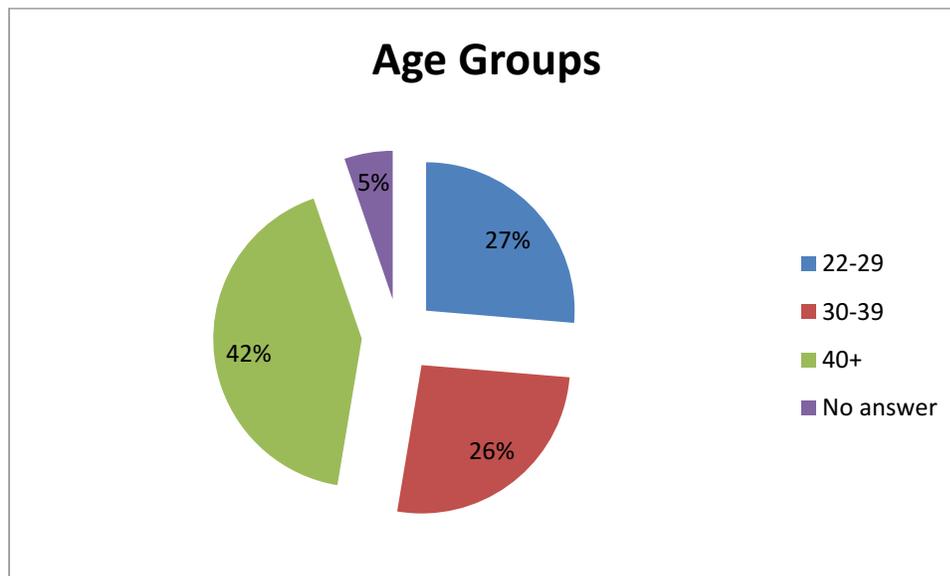
New Rochelle, New York

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Background

The School of New Resources (SNR) at the College of New Rochelle was established in 1973 to cater to adult learners, returning students, and nontraditional students. The SNR is designed as a baccalaureate liberal arts program and registers only adults twenty-one and older (with high school diploma or equivalent). The school offers courses in communications, foreign languages, letters (English composition, and literature, philosophy and religious studies), psychology, and the social sciences. The school has six locations: the main campus and five branch campuses throughout the New York City metropolitan area.

1. Demographics of Students in First Collaboration Project Spring 2010



Source: (Newby)

For a number of years leading up to this project, there were no credit-bearing information literacy courses being offered to students. Prior to this there was a two-credit course, *Library as a Research Tool*, which was offered for many years but had become outdated and was taken out of the course offerings to be revised and updated in curriculum content. In the absence of this course, however, students had a minimum of one formal opportunity (during each semester), to develop their information literacy skills. This was offered through the mandatory library instruction class to the English/writing courses of *ELI (Experience, Learning & Identity)* and/or *TEE (Translating Experience into Essay)*. Additionally, students could at most, get a second information literacy class, that on *Using RefWorks*, the reference management tool, but only if the classroom instructor approved and allowed another hour of their class time for such instruction. Concerns began to surface regarding students' competency levels in information literacy skills. The author considered that a solution to this issue would be to improve the amount of information literacy teaching given to the students, training that would help facilitate their learning these skills for the duration of semester rather than just the one or two fifty-minute classes.

Introduction

A first version of this project took place during spring semester 2010 as a partnership between the librarian and a psychology instructor. The project which is the subject of this report was repeated during spring semester 2012 and was undertaken by the librarian and an English/writing instructor. A review of the literature was done and a decision was made to embark on a classroom faculty-librarian collaboration. Though it is equivalent to the other schools in the College, the library does not offer credit-bearing courses. It was evident that as library faculty member, the author needed to collaborate with a classroom faculty member.

The librarian solicited the classroom faculty member for the collaboration project. Finding a colleague willing to work with the librarian was not easy as undoubtedly there would be added responsibilities on the part of any faculty member who opts for such collaboration. Approval for this collaboration was sought from the dean of libraries who communicated with the Dean of SNR and approval was given for proceeding on an 'informal' basis. It was emphasized that strict adherence should be given to the SNR catalog of course offerings and New York State Education Department (NYSED) requirements. It was emphasized that in order to formalize the collaboration, the course outline would have to be approved by all the deans, sanctioned by the Curriculum Development Committee, the senior vice president for academic affairs, and the NYSED to ensure that the college conforms with standards and regulations enforced by those bodies. Thus, the course description or outline was not changed to incorporate library-specific assignments and the librarian could not be involved in course teaching or paper grading. In library and in-class library instruction could be done and the classroom instructor could share the course outline with the librarian in order for customized library instruction to be developed.

The Process

There were at least two meetings to discuss the details of the project which included decisions on meeting times with the class, deciding on appropriate points for inserting library- and information literacy-related components to specific assignments throughout the semester's schedule. The undertaking of this project placed additional responsibilities on the librarian in addition to the regular duties of the position. Included in the preparatory work was the development of a tool to measure the learning outcomes of the project. The tool decided on was a pre- and post-test questionnaire, each consisting of the same fourteen questions. These were developed by the librarian. Four meetings were planned with the class to fit into the length of the semester.

The first meeting took place during the first class of the semester for a period of approximately one hour. The librarian was introduced to the class and an overview of the collaboration project was explained to the students. Each student was asked to add their name and phone number to a numbered list. The students were then given the pre-test exercises to do using a workstation. They were guided to the library home page (only because they were new students). There was no help beyond this point, neither from the Librarian nor from fellow students. Each student's questionnaire got a unique number. At the end of the exercise the pre-test questionnaires were collected by the librarian.

The second meeting was also held in a computer lab to afford each student a workstation and the session was a basic library instruction class focused on finding information. An agenda, guide sheet and communication information were distributed to the students. The instruction session was followed up with hands-on exercises and this gave the students an opportunity to practice the newly-learned skills.

The third meeting was in a Smart Board classroom, was on the reference management tool, RefWorks, and was an hour long. Again, students were encouraged to ask library staff for help with their coursework if necessary. Between the meetings with the class, the librarian sent e-

mail messages to the students with relevant links on the library home page that could help them with the assignments. They also received a document on information mapping and a guide to planning a research paper.

The fourth and final meeting was in a computer lab and students were asked to complete the post-test, again without help from the librarian or their classmates. After each had completed the test, the student was asked to answer two pre-formatted questions (selected responses are included in Appendix 1):

- Please give your comments on the *Collaboration Project* between the Librarian and your Class Instructor
- How did you use the library and its resources during this semester?

Findings

The class started with sixteen students and three joined later. The responses of the nineteen students were as follows:

- 16 students did the pre-test
- 11 students did both pre and post-test
- 14 students completed the post-test
- 3 students did only the post-test; all of them scored above 12 of 14 possible points
- 5 of the original 16 students did not do the post-test
- Of the 11 students who completed both texts, 6 had a higher number of correct answers in the post-test

Shortcomings

A few students joined class weeks after the semester began and unfortunately, they were also some who did not continue to the end of the semester or were just not present for the last class when the post-test session was administered. This affected the easy horizontal comparison between results of the pre- and post-test.

Another issue was that since this was a writing class, there was a plan for the students to do a sample writing exercise on an assigned topic which would be given at the first class but this was not done. Conversely, there was supposed to be another writing exercise towards the end of the semester, to be done in order to examine and compare both essays for substantiation of improvement.

A part of the collaboration was that a brief assessment of the impressions of the classroom faculty would be given to the librarian on the semester-long project and this was not done. However, in the last meeting with the students, the faculty member did give verbal positive assessment on the progressive change in the type, variety, and number of academic sources which the students used in their academic research and writing.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the post-test, the exit comments and the commentary from the classroom instructor, the semester-long exposure to information literacy skills was beneficial to the students' learning processes and outcomes. Even though this is an aside, a subsequent information literacy session given by the project librarian during the next semester included many students who had participated in the collaboration project. Through their interaction with the librarian and fellow students, displayed of their knowledge of the finding relevant information, analyzing and managing results, and formatting references which was more developed than those who were not in the class even though they may not have been new students.

The expectations are that this collaboration project will be duplicated and facilitated by other librarians and classroom faculty throughout the School of New Resources as well as other undergraduate schools in the College of New Rochelle.

Appendix 1

A. Samples of Research Assignments

Session Three:

Assignment: Do an annotated bibliography [reference list] of 4 sources for *The Allegory of the Cave*.

Session Six:

Assignment: Write notes on the steps you used for locating material on the topic *theory of education*.

Session Eight:

Assignment: Find 4 critical analyses on *Siddharta* and write a 3-paragraph abstract on each reference you select.

Session Nine:

Assignment: Search the Gill Library catalog and see how many editions of the book *Malcolm X* are included. Use *RefWorks* to compile your reference list.

B. Exit Responses

Student's Exit Questionnaire

Question 1/ Answer – It was good the Instructor told us good information to get better research from the Library website.

Question 2/ Answer – I rarely used the school's Library website.

Student's Exit Questionnaire

Question 1/ Answer – Yes, I learn lot and it help me with my research paper for my class. I did understand more than last year because it take the time to explain more than really show us how to do it in the computer by going to the lab and trying to do it.

Question 2/ Answer – I use the Library and its resources during the semester by ask for help when I need it in the Library and the resource at my house.

Student's Exit Questionnaire

Question 1/ Answer – In my opinion the collaboration project between the Librarian and [INSTRUCTOR] was successful. I found it very helpful in doing my research paper for TEE and I believe that the collaboration should continue in the future semesters. [INSTRUTOR] and [LIBRARIAN] together are a good team.

Question 2/ Answer – I used the Library and its resources online during this semester. I found it to be quite easy after going through the tutorial sessions that [LIBRARIAN] taught. [LIBRARIAN] did an outstanding job and I look forward to her assistance next semester.

Student's Exit Questionnaire

Question 1/ Answer – The collaboration project between Librarian and class Instructor are good. Especially the collaboration of the Librarian with the student is very helpful and useful. The Librarians are very polite with the students also. She helps a lot of the student if they need any help for the research paper.

Question 2/ Answer – I used the Library resources during this semester in the College library as well as at home for my research paper. I found my articles for research paper using the Library resources. It is very helpful for the students.

Student's Exit Questionnaire

Question 1/ Answer – The collaboration between my class Instructor and the Librarian are with good communication. Every class project that was given has been explained in detail the Library computer system and what was needed to complete all of my projects. The Librarians are wonderful, helpful people.

Question 2/ Answer – I use the Library resources to research information for class journals and essays. The Library is always available for every type of use all of the resources are updated. The Librarians thought me how to use the computer and how to research to find sources to cite them in my essays.

C. Checklist

- Identify area of Need
- Solicit a Classroom Teaching Faculty
- Submit Proposal to Deans and/or Appropriate Person/Body
- Determine along with Classroom Faculty the Number & Timing of Meetings w/ Librarian
- Develop tools to be Used [Pre- & Post-test instruments; guides]
- Work with Teaching Faculty on Information Literacy Components of Course Outline
- Administer Pre-test
- Effect Periodic Communication w/ Students
- Administer Post-test
- Tabulate data
- Write Report
- Submit Report
- Thanks [To Teacher; Gifts of appreciation to Students] (Optional)

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