

Report from the LEAP Rubric Assessment Project at the Bristol Community College Libraries

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Abstract

Information Literacy is an integral part of student learning, and librarians are at the forefront of teaching this critical skill. Librarians at Bristol Community College (BCC) participated in the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) Rubric Initiative in order to begin assessing the information literacy skills of the student body.

Introduction

Information Literacy is a critical component of deep integrative learning for students at the college level. Librarians at Bristol Community College are responsible for working with faculty to incorporate information literacy into the curriculum.

Currently, traditional "one shot" information literacy sessions are provided to students when a faculty member submits a request. It follows that only students who take classes in which an information literacy session is requested receive this type of instruction. Additionally, there has

not historically been an effective method of assessing the efficacy of the "one shot."

In 2013, Bristol Community College participated in the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education's Vision Project pilot on assessing the use of AAC&U's Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubrics. Initially the pilot was to investigate the use of three student learning outcomes: written communication, quantitative literacy, and critical thinking. Though not required to participate in the study, BCC Libraries volunteered to evaluate library information

literacy programs using the LEAP Value Information Literacy Rubric.

Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) Rubrics provide common assessment tools that are being used nation-wide. Those institutions choosing to evaluate the information literacy of the student body have access to this tool through the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Coincidentally, Bristol Community College was also preparing for an accreditation visit from New England Association of Schools & Colleges (NEASC). In advance of this visit BCC faculty and staff prepared the Bristol Community College Self-Study Report. This report highlights, among other things, the information literacy sessions provided by the library.

The spring 2014 visit from NEASC concluded as information from the LEAP Rubric was being assessed. This happy coincidence has led to a deeper understanding of information literacy in general, as well as the teaching of information literacy at Bristol Community College.

The goal of the following report is to elucidate the findings of the LEAP Rubric assessment project, highlight the recommendations of the NEASC accreditation committee, and propose strategies to improve access and delivery of information literacy at Bristol Community College

Methodology

In order to assess the information literacy of the BCC student body, librarians needed access to the end-products of their instruction. An email was sent to faculty who had requested an information literacy session in the fall of 2013 on the Fall River campus. The initial scope of the

request for artifacts was small, as there was limited money available for work on the project.

An artifact, as defined for the LEAP Rubric assessment project, is a finished work assigned in a specific class. The range of artifacts collected were diverse in nature, giving us a broad sample to examine.

Three members of the faculty volunteered artifacts from projects that involved an information literacy session. This represented three different departments: Clinical Laboratory Science, Early Childhood Education, and English. The artifacts themselves were a term paper, a second term paper, and slides from an oral presentation. Twenty-two artifacts in all were collected.

The three members of the faculty that submitted assignments also volunteered to sit on the assessment team. The assessment team was composed of the three faculty members and two full time librarians.

In order to be able to assess the artifacts in an unbiased manner any grading or commentary written on the artifact by the faculty was stripped. The names of the students who had created the artifacts were also stripped from the documents. The text of the assignment was not collected as the assessment team decided they were not assessing the artifacts for adherence to the assignment, but for the information literacy skills displayed within. However, since the faculty members who assigned the artifacts were sitting on the assessment team, there was also some discussion about the nature of the assignments during the assessment process.

Five copies of each assignment were made for each assessment team member and numbered from 1 to 22. This was to ensure all assessed

artifacts were the same. The assessment team met three times in person to work through the artifacts. Each artifact was assessed simultaneously by each assessment team member and then the score was discussed as a group.

Results

The Information Literacy VALUE Rubric is divided into 5 competencies: Determine the extent of information needed; access the needed information; evaluate information and its sources critically; use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose; and access and use information ethically and legally (AACU). Each of these competencies is judged against 4 standards of five points each for a potential total of 20 points. (See Appendix 1).

The fine print of the rubric encouraged assessors to “assign a zero to any work that does not meet benchmark level performance.” (AACU). The assessment team was not aware of this direction at the outset and initially assigned a score of 5

as the lowest possible score. This inevitably skews the total average for the artifacts, which would undoubtedly been lower had the team realized that zeroes could be assigned.

Despite this error scores ranged from 5, the lowest score possible, to 20, the highest score possible. Figure 1 illustrates the range of scores that students achieved when judged against the information literacy rubric.

Once all twenty-two artifacts were assessed, averages were calculated. First the average of a particular artifact across all 5 assessment team scores, and then an average of those totals. (See Appendix 2).

The average score for artifacts assessed was 11.2. This number would likely be lower had we considered scoring some of the artifacts at zero. However, the results do display a wide disparity of information literacy concepts.

While 23% of artifacts scored were between 15 and 20 points, a majority of the artifacts, 45%,

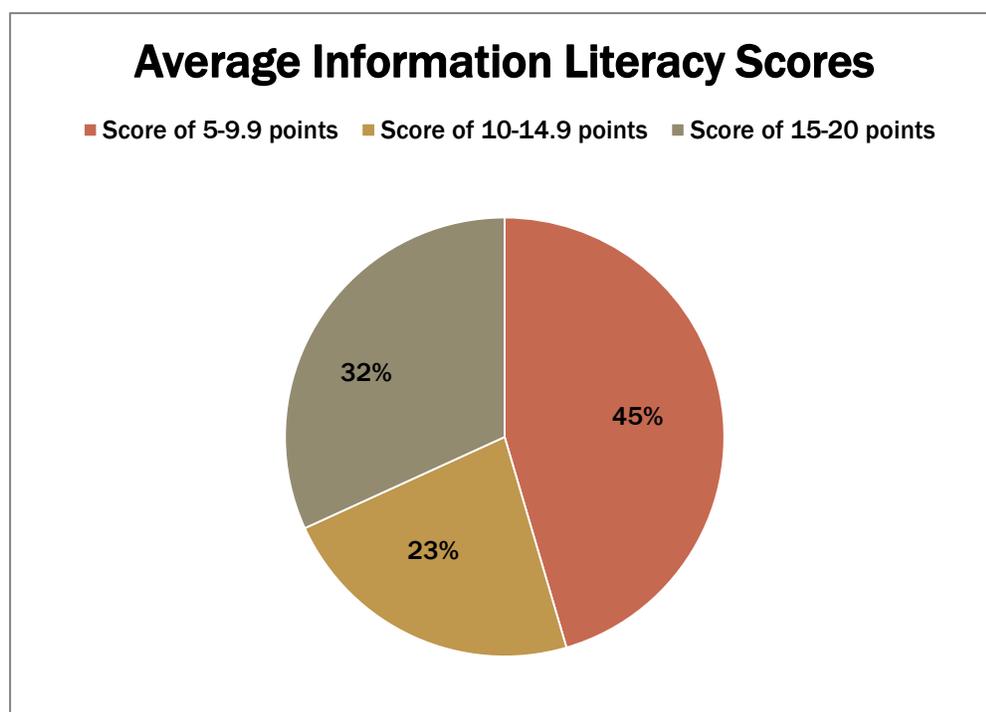


Fig. 1 Average scores assigned to artifacts when graded against the information literacy rubric. Displayed here in ranges from 5-9.9, 10-14.9, and 15-20 points.

fell below the 10 point mark.

Discussion

The LEAP Rubric assessment project allowed the librarians at BCC to gain some insight into how our current methods of teaching information Literacy (the “one shot”) are affecting our students.

“One shot” library instruction sessions are just that- one opportunity for the librarian to teach a wide variety of information literacy skills. Often librarians are invited to a single class session and asked to teach all the skills required for a student to adequately research a topic. Usually topics range from web site evaluation to in-depth database research. These topics can be difficult to grasp for novice researchers, and students may feel overwhelmed by the amount of information received during a session.

Librarians understand that faculty have very little time to dedicate to guest lecturers. Librarians need faculty in order to gain access to the students. The challenge, then, is creating an integrative information literacy strategy that evolves the “one shot” while working with faculty to best fit into their curriculum.

As mentioned in the introduction, the NEASC accreditation board visited the BCC campus in the spring of 2014. Their findings, as they pertained to the library and the campus as a whole highlighted the need for information literacy to become a focal point.

NEASC stated in their exit report that at BCC there “is no clear delineation of how information literacy learning outcomes are incorporated into curriculum, nor does the college effectively assess student development of information

literacy competencies as they progress through their program.” (B. Rezendes, personal communication, April 2, 2014).

The NEASC exit report served to bolster the findings of the LEAP Rubric assessment project reinforce the concept that information literacy is a crucial component of a college education. BCC Librarians propose the following strategies that will strengthen current information literacy models and increase access to information literacy concepts for a larger portion of the BCC student body.

Proposals

Faculty-Librarian Partnerships

Students will benefit from increased access to information literacy concepts, and librarians and faculty can come together in meaningful partnerships to make this happen. First, if a professor has not already incorporated a research assignment into his or her course, BCC librarians are available to consult on the resources students may access. A Faculty Resources Libguide was created in order to inspire faculty with several different research based assignment possibilities. Highlighted research assignments range from literature reviews to annotated bibliographies. The Faculty Resources Libguide also provides links to resources regarding information literacy in the medium of links and videos.

We can use this knowledge to identify weak spots in the library collection and raise new possibilities for collection development. This kind of partnership will also highlight useful material that may currently be overlooked. This will also lead to a greater understanding of college library collections for faculty. As librarians and faculty work together to create

research assignments an understanding of resources to which students have access will grow. Working with librarians in assignment design and research also indicates that at-risk students benefit from curricula that is relevant. (Bray, Pascerella, & Pierson, 2004).

One-Shot with a “Chaser”

Traditional library “one shot” information literacy sessions are working, but they’re not working as well as they could. What started as a cheeky suggestion and play on words has actually become one of the more popular recommendations to come out of the LEAP Rubric assessment project. The idea was presented during BCC’s annual Professional Day and was received very positively by the faculty attending the session.

The proposal of “one shot with a chaser” relies on the traditional model of library instruction. The update comes in the form of the “chaser.” Librarians aim to continue “one shot” information literacy sessions while adding a shorter follow-up session with the same class at a later date.

This proposal will allow students time to practice their newly attained research skills. When the librarian comes back for the chaser session, students will be able to ask for clarification, schedule individual research consultations via the new Book-a-Librarian program, and discuss research strategies.

This reinforcement will be beneficial to the faculty as well. They will be able to ascertain the level of research completed to a specific point, as well as to counsel on the direction in which the research is going. Students will feel supported in their research efforts, and having further access to reference and instruction

librarians will help to reinforce the fact that there is assistance available.

Multiple Sessions

BCC Librarians are extremely flexible and desire to provide faculty with as many options as possible. One possibility proposed would be to break a single library instruction session up into several shorter visits over a semester.

The inspiration for this model comes from the engineering librarians, advisors, and faculty at the University of Pittsburgh. At the University of Pittsburgh (“Pitt”) information literacy is embedded into the freshmen year curriculum in the guise of 3 mini sessions during the fall semester and a conference in the spring.

A partnership between librarians, the writing center, and freshmen engineering faculty led to this innovative approach to information literacy.

The main goal of this partnership is to provide students with real world experience. During their first freshman semester students “research various fields of engineering and learn about companies and jobs and “hot topics” in their area of interest.” (Bundy, Larkin, Calliso & Thomes, 2002). This exposes the students to what they can expect to experience in their chosen field of engineering.

Bundy et al reported that during the spring semester of their freshman year, Pitt engineering students “collect data for the creation of a conference paper on sustainability.” The project culminates in a one day conference where students present their research.

The Bevier Engineering Library created a Libguide on which students can get information for each of their assignment. Libguides can

create a research home-page for the students to refer back to with pertinent links to databases, research tips, and other useful data.

For BCC a multiple session approach may look different than the Pitt model. However, BCC has a strong writing lab and several departments that may benefit from a similar approach to information literacy. Biology, business, psychology, criminal justice, and nursing (to name a few) courses could incorporate library information literacy and the writing lab in a similar method.

Embedded Librarians

Along with the rest of the known academic universe, BCC teaches numerous online and distance education courses. Information literacy is just as important online as it is in the physical classroom.

The concept of the embedded librarian has been around since online classrooms evolved. The purpose of embedded librarians is to provide research assistance to students involved in distance education programs. Research has shown that “this model offers perhaps the most effective and lasting platform for institution and embedded librarian with at-risk college students.” (Fisher & Heaney, 2011).

Examples of such research assistance include (any combination of) synchronous online Q&A sessions with a librarian via a scheduled group chat; or asynchronous assistance via monitored discussion boards, email messaging and tutorials -- all embedded into the course management system, for a more personalized experience within the context of a given course.

Embedded librarians need to be utilized to a greater extent. Professors who wish to further the information literacy of their students should

create assignments that involve research. The most advantageous thing would be to create an assignment which requires consultation with the embedded librarian.

Conclusions

Today’s incoming freshman has a lot of work to do to gain proficiency in information literacy competencies. Recent high school graduates have reported that they are not prepared for the level of academic work expected of them at the college level.

An informal polling of local high schools has illustrated a troubling information literacy gap between high school and college. Budget cuts have affected the scheduled availability of librarians as well as library operating hours. (S. Souza-Mort, personal communication, April 2, 2014). When students enter BCC they are not prepared for database research and rely heavily on Google to answer research questions. Most students report their research competencies from high school were inadequate for college level research. (Head, 2013).

Librarians can be a primary weapon in the deployment of information literacy within the community college. With the methods mentioned in the proposal section most class needs can be met with information literacy instruction. Incorporating librarians into the classroom in a more functional way will enhance student research ability and encourage academic integrity.

Assessment of information literacy must continue college wide. Through collaborative initiatives, faculty members and librarians can succeed in stimulating college students’ higher-order thinking skills and preparing them for advanced academic achievement.

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