



I Don't Have Time to Teach That: The Benefits of Faculty-Librarian Collaborations

COMMUNITY COLLEGE instructors have a great deal to teach: study skills, a college orientation to education, and the actual course information for their discipline. They also know that their students must be information literate, must know how to find supplementary information for each course, how to use information effectively, and how to credit their sources appropriately. In this regard, Washington State Community and Technical Colleges have been working under an LSTA grant on Information Literacy from 2008-2012 (Washington). Lower Columbia College libraries have been using the grant to integrate librarians or library tutorials into face-to-face and online classes, thereby offering information literacy instruction to students without increasing the teaching load of the discipline instructors. When incorporated with research assignments, this instruction, along with embedded librarians, facilitates both student learning and faculty grading of assignments.

Just as colleges have integrated Reading Across the Curriculum, at Lower Columbia College we integrate Critical Thinking and Information Literacy across the curriculum. This can lead instructors to say: "I have to teach the material of the discipline, how can I also teach the skills of source evaluation, citation, plagiarism, summarization, and formatting – all of which they should have learned as freshmen?"

Librarians to the rescue

There are many reasons students may not have learned evaluation, citation, summarization and formatting skills. Sometimes they have been exposed to these ideas, but have not been able to transfer them from course to course. Sometimes they have skipped pre-requisites. Sometimes they just need additional exposure to the ideas. Whatever the reason, the librarians can help teach or reteach these ideas. We have been integrating information literacy across the curriculum at Lower Columbia College using several different approaches.

One approach brings the librarian into the class where we can lead sessions on topics such as source evaluation. In fact, our first LSTA grant involved working with instructors to create lessons in which students review different types of sources appropriate for the subject at hand, and identify why the material would be more or less appropriate for different types of audiences. Some instructors prefer to have us grade these assignments or discussion forums, others prefer to do it themselves – but either way, it eases the burden on the discipline instructor (Determining).

A second approach involves the preparation of a subject guide for a course or entire department. We use a standardized outline of the research process (overview, keywords, article selections, article evaluation, citation, presentation format), and populate that outline with resources and links for students. One grant allowed us to create our first subject guide. It was on business management and the librarian identified subject encyclopedias and links to various books and other resources available through the college. The business instructor identified specific web resources to help students. We also linked particularly useful databases directly to the subject guide. The preferred citation format for the discipline is identified on the subject guide, as well as links to resources explaining it, and to a citation generator which does it reasonably well. The librarian embedded videos of the research process into the subject guide to make it even clearer for students as they walk through the research process (Business).

Another approach involves the use of a prepared videocast or PowerPoint presentation. Our instructors may say "I'm going to assign an article review in Genetics," and we will make an instructional screencast showing the students how to access articles, how to compare them, and how to cite them. This third LSTA grant coincided with the development of a new genetics course, and included creating of a subject guide, research

tutorials, and online assistance. The instructor asked the librarian to grade the article quality and the accuracy of the citations, allowing the instructor to concentrate on content (GillaspySteinhilper).

Instructors have found these resources helpful to their students in different ways. Some require students to walk through the subject guide tutorials for credit – others offer them as options. Other instructors embed the tutorials into an online class, or ask the librarian to visit the classroom and offer the tutorials for a refresher. And some instructors want quizzes based on the tutorials, some use them as the basis for discussion forums. Our librarians try to accommodate whatever method is most useful to the instructor.

You may not have space in your classroom to teach research skills. However, that is one basis of the library discipline, and we will teach it wherever we can. Just ask us.

Andrea Gillasp-Steinhilper is a reference librarian at Lower Columbia College.

see **LIBRARIAN**
Page 2

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Three Steps to Better Course Evaluations

WITH EACH SEMESTER'S end comes the often-dreaded course evaluation process. Will the students be gentle and offer constructive criticism, or will their comments be harsh and punitive? What do students really want out of a course, anyway? A better time to think about course evaluations is at the beginning of the semester. At that point, an instructor can be proactive in three areas that I have found lead to better course evaluations.

1. Understand and accept today's college students. First and foremost, students want us to know who they are. They want us to know their names and to know about their world. Today's students are busy, technologically savvy, and multitaskers. Some are prepared for college work; others are not. Regardless of their backgrounds, all students have lofty ambitions and want to succeed. To help them, we can provide background knowledge in our subject areas. We also need to share the rationale behind what we do and ask students to do. I recommend making invisible expectations explicit. I regularly start class by saying, "We are learning this because..." When students understand why and how the material is relevant to them, they find more motivation to study and end up rating the course more highly.

2. Establish clear criteria for grading. All students want good grades, and they want to know exactly how to get those grades. College students today have experienced criteria sheets and rubrics since elementary school, and they want the same in college. They want to know where they stand on any given day in the semester.

After 20 years of college teaching, I have learned that telling students that their grades are based on percentages (20 percent homework, 25 percent quizzes, etc.) does not have meaning for them. They cannot figure their grades with a percentage system. A total point grading scale provides that clarity. Each assignment, quiz, lab paper, project, or exam has a certain number of points. These point values can be listed in the syllabus as well as the total points needed for the final grade. To help students keep track of their points, I give them a worksheet and explain that if they record their points, they will know exactly how many they have and how many they still need to earn.

I get rave reviews about my "no-mystery" approach to grading on course evaluations, and I believe that the good reviews are due to

the clarity and ease of the total point system. I re-explain the grading system after the first assignments/quizzes/tests are returned. On the first day of classes, students are overloaded with information. It's not until after an assignment has been graded that they are ready to understand how the grading system works.

3. Get formative feedback early. The end-of-course evaluation is a summative one. Although it aims to help us improve future courses, it does not enable us to respond to the needs of the students currently enrolled in the course. Formative feedback collected early in the course accomplishes that goal.

The first major paper or exam is a great time to collect formative feedback. I recommend attaching a page to the back of the exam, or asking students to respond to questions like these on the day papers are due:

1. How long did you study for this exam or work on preparing this paper?
2. How/where did you study/write?
3. Which class activities (lectures, discussions, reviews, online notes) helped you the most in learning this material? Why?
4. Which class activities helped you the least? Why?
5. Which topics remain the most difficult for you?
6. What has a professor done in the past that helped you learn?

If I have students answer these questions on a page attached to the exam, I let them know they can tear that page off and submit it anonymously when they turn in the exam.

You can also ask for feedback once that first exam or paper has been graded and returned. I like to ask questions then about improvement goals—what the student wants to do better and what else could be done in class to support their efforts to improve. If you don't want to deal with open-ended questions, students can rate declarative statements such as "I would prefer more discussion of assigned readings."

If you ask for their input, students will want to see that you listened to them. They may expect some changes. A short report back to them can be used to explain what you are willing and not willing to change, and why.

Students aren't qualified to comment about all aspects of instruction, but they can rate how they feel about the classroom climate. They are good evaluators of what helps them learn and what confuses them. Getting their feedback early in the semester enables you to tailor the course to their learning needs.

Finally, it helps to talk about your evaluation results with a trusted colleague. Sharing student responses can help us see patterns in evaluations and sort out the "outliers" or just plain wacky comments. Knowing what our students need helps us teach in ways that promote their learning, and that means better results on the end-of-course evaluations.

Dr. Mary C. Clement is the director of the Center for Teaching Excellence at Berry College.

Dr. Mary C. Clement; Three Steps to Better Course Evaluations; Faculty Focus; July 30, 2012; [http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/faculty-evaluation/three-steps-to-better-course-evaluations/?utm_source=cheetah&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=2012.07.30%20-%20Faculty%20Focus%20Update]; September 18, 2012.

LIBRARIAN

Continued from Page 1

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Andrea Gillaspys-Steinhilper; "I Don't Have Time to Teach That: The Benefits of Faculty-Librarian Collaborations;" Faculty Focus; July 16, 2012; [<http://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/instructional-design/i-dont-have-time-to-teach-that-the-benefits-of-faculty-librarian-collaborations/>]; September 18, 2012.