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Eyes Toward the Future: Framing For-credit Information Literacy Instruction

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Abstract

LSU Libraries recently redesigned its one-credit hour information literacy course taught by librarians for undergraduate students. This redesign coincided with a shift from face-to-face to online course delivery at a local level alongside the implementation of the University's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) on undergraduate research that would lead to increased course enrollment at the university level. At the national level, there was a transition to ACRL's *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (*Framework*). The Libraries' Instruction Committee engaged in a holistic reconceptualization of the course, beginning with debating and designing new student learning outcomes (SLOs) and attributes before considering content and assessment. Although for-credit courses provide librarians with an avenue to impact information literacy growth more deeply than a single instruction session (commonly referred to as a "one-shot"), these courses are increasingly rare. Nonetheless, the *Framework* represents an opportunity for librarians to redesign existing instruction on small and large scales.

Keywords: Information literacy; Library instruction; Accreditation; Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP); Student learning outcomes (SLOs)

Introduction

LSU Libraries at Louisiana State University (LSU) has been offering a for-credit information literacy course since the 1980s. This course, LIS 1001: Library Research Methods and Materials, was developed through the School of Library and Information Science at LSU, is overseen by the Instruction Coordinator at LSU Libraries, and is taught solely by instruction librarians in the Research and Instruction department. Course content includes the “fundamentals of college-level research; location, evaluation and use of information for research needs; introduction to the library and to the organization, access and retrieval of information; hands-on experience in a variety of printed and electronic resources” (LSU, 2014-2015, para. 1). By the early 2000s, all course sections were taught face-to-face and tied to requirements for undergraduate majors in the School of Mass Communication and the Department of Communication Studies. Once LIS 1001 was dropped as a requirement for one of the two programs, enrollment fell.

While the drop in enrollment was concerning, it was not the only challenge instruction librarians faced with the course. There was a limited number of instruction classrooms in the main library, Middleton Library, and those classrooms were used for all library instruction, not just for LIS 1001. Even though scheduling could usually be accommodated, the classroom’s physical design presented problems for the librarians. With the presenter’s computer at the front of the room and fixed rows of tables with desktop computers, librarians were hamstrung by the inflexible environment. Integrating elements of active learning or group work was difficult. In an effort to combat this and to support more flexible delivery, the librarians had moved most sections of the course to an online environment by 2016.

This transition to online delivery satisfied many of the course's students and instruction librarians but resulted in new challenges. Online courses are convenient for students because they do not require classroom visits, thus enrollment in the course slightly stabilized despite it being dropped as a requirement for the mass communication program. As a result, a course conceived of as a lower-level course ideally taken by freshmen to lay the foundation for academic research was actually being taken by students from a variety of years and disciplines. Instruction librarians struggled to craft a course that was appropriate given the mix of students and the lack of ties to a particular curriculum.

An initial response might be to simply discontinue the course and to refocus energies instead on emphasizing tailored, one-shot instruction sessions. However, around the time that librarians were grappling with the challenges of this course, LSU announced a new Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), a function of the accreditation process for schools in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). The QEP was developed by the University based on SACSCOC guidelines and

(1) includes a process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment, (2) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution, (3) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP, (4) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP, and (5) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement. (SACSCOC, 2015, para. 1)

For LSU, the QEP was designed to focus on undergraduate research. More specifically, this undergraduate research aim would be manifested through

significantly improving student learning outcomes (SLOs) through strategic

reorientations of teaching, mentoring, and curricula that take advantage of one of the signal strengths of the university: its extensive research mission. Through LSU's implementation of this five-year [...plan], students will develop understanding of research and its essential role in the improvement of life, have broader and earlier opportunities to become involved in undergraduate research, become involved in focused multiple-semester mentored research experiences, and learn to present new knowledge have had a part in creating. (LSU, 2014, p. 4)

The QEP outlines five SLOs as targeted areas of student growth, with one SLO being information literacy. In QEP documentation addressing the institutional process for meeting this SLO, one of the mechanisms for introducing students to information literacy was the for-credit library course. This meant that librarians would likely face an increase in enrollment and continue to see diversity in terms of grade levels and disciplines represented. Additionally, because the course was identified as the primary vehicle for introducing students to information literacy, discontinuing it to emphasize information literacy instruction elsewhere was no longer a viable option.

Under the direction of the Instruction Coordinator, the Instruction Committee then began to engage in course redesign. This work started with the development of goals. The revised course had to:

- Support the shift from face-to-face to online
- Align with the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*
- Ensure common language and agile application
- Contain a more authentic experience that mirrored the research lifecycle
- Promote continuous improvement
- Allow for library faculty to maintain ownership of the class and content
- Underpin the work of the QEP

This article discusses how the Instruction Committee was able to address these goals.

Using a collaborative, step-by-step process grounded in the literature and curriculum development, the Committee crafted SLOs. These SLOs needed to align with the *Framework* and the QEP and to provide the structure for developing assessment in the future.

Background

LSU is the state's flagship university and holds a Research Active/Very High (R1) Carnegie classification. The Libraries is composed of a main library, where the Research and Instruction department is housed, and a separate special collections library. These collectively serve a campus of over 30,000 students. While librarians in Special Collections maintain an active instruction program using their collection, the Research and Instruction department oversees campus-wide information literacy instruction. Within the department is the Instruction Committee, which is overseen by an Instruction Coordinator and includes a cohort of eight instruction librarians. The Committee met with varying frequency to discuss instruction elements, best practices and lessons learned, and strategies to advance information literacy instruction.

A variety of instruction is conducted by the members of this department. In addition to the for-credit library class, instruction includes tutorials, guides, embedded online instruction, one-shot instruction sessions, and consultations. In the past, the foundation for all methods of instruction was ACRL's *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (Standards)* that outlined information literacy and the associated performance indicators and outcomes for an information literate student (ACRL, 2000). Once ACRL's draft *Framework* was released, the Instruction Committee began to align LIS 1001 with it. In reviewing the draft *Framework*, the Committee began

to discuss the role the frames would play in LIS 1001 to determine how the *Framework* would impact course design and instruction. The conversations spurred on by the draft *Framework* contributed to a collective understanding that the LIS 1001 course needed a redesign and holistic reconceptualization.

Literature Review

For the process discussed, various fields of literature were consulted, including education theory, library science research, past and present information literacy standards, and local and national higher education accreditation documentation. The library science literature examined related to credit-bearing information literacy courses and assessment of instruction. Research regarding different modes of information literacy instruction was not consulted for this project because the Committee knew from the start that the QEP required a credit-bearing course. While QEP campus advisors had requested section(s) of LIS 1001 be taught face-to-face, the Committee reviewed the literature to determine potential benefits and shortfalls of online-only delivery. Research by librarians at Miami University Middletown helped to confirm the decision to move the course online because, for students, “[c]oming to campus at set times does not work for all. Moreover, online scholarly research is more doable than ever before, with expanding library resources and services and the free tools available on the Internet” (Long, Burke, & Tumbleson, 2012, p. 390).

The Committee also looked at how other academic libraries developed their online information literacy courses. Librarians at the University of Florida (UF) built an online information literacy course for undergraduates “based largely on the ACRL standards of information literacy” (Clapp, Johnson, Schwieder, & Craig, 2013, p. 252).

While the Committee was seeking to align the course with the *Framework*, the UF article proved useful in terms of detailing the process for creating and structuring an online course. Specifically, the authors emphasized learning outcomes, which became the structure and foundation for assessment in the LIS 1001 redesign (Clapp et al., 2013, p. 251).

The Committee used backward design to theoretically frame their process during the redesign. Backward design, as outlined in “Overview of UBD & the Design Template,” depicts a staged process: Stage 1 - Desired Results, Stage 2 - Assessment Evidence, and Stage 3 - Learning Plan (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 2). Using the stages enabled the Committee to take a backward approach and work from finish to start. The Committee’s guiding question asked what skills a successful student would demonstrate after completing the course. The answer to this question laid the foundation for the redesign.

Lastly, the Committee looked to the literature for support in aligning the course with the *Framework*. Oakleaf (2014) highlighted

that the Framework is a significant change from the previous Standards. The Standards outline competencies, skills, and outcomes that students need to achieve in order to become information literate. In contrast, the Task Force has organized the new Framework around six frames, each centered on a ‘threshold concept’ they determined to be an integral component of information literacy. (p. 1)

In other words, use of the *Framework* has presented librarians with a challenge as they consider how to assess information literacy in a landscape without specific outcomes.

The Committee, for now, has elected to use a hybrid approach for implementing the *Framework* while still relying on outcomes for assessment and QEP reporting. As librarians continue to become more comfortable with the frames and with threshold

concepts, the course will continue to be evolve.

Oakleaf (2014) provided a theoretical understanding of this shift. Carncross (2015) offered a practical demonstration of how to rewrite SLOs informed by the *Framework*. The shift from the *Standards* to the *Framework* outlined how some SLOs “should be left as-is, while others needed to be revised or completely reworked” (Carncross, 2015, p. 248). Carncross also verbally and visually demonstrated how to rework assignments and activities to fit within the frames.

Step-by-step Process and Results

The Instruction Committee began by reviewing the existing documentation that structured the course. To do this, the Committee looked at the Common Course Outline (CCO), an in-house document that was previously created to align the course content with the *Standards*. Its intention was to norm the curriculum while leaving ample space for individual authorship. The nine sections covered in the CCO were: online catalogs, classification systems, search strategies, periodicals, citation use and format, periodical databases, reference sources, evaluating sources, and government information.

Initially the Committee considered updating the CCO. This was quickly determined to be a time consuming task that left librarians uneasy. The CCO represented a list of tools students should be proficient with rather than the skills they needed to demonstrate proficiency. The librarians did not all equally value or emphasize all tools, so having to include them in the course felt prescriptive. Additionally, the CCO did not establish a path for better assessment, which was a requirement of the QEP. Given this, the librarians decided to discontinue using it as the structuring document. Instead, it became a tool to identify crucial components of the course in the redesign.

In identifying the essential aspects of the course, the librarians had to reflect on the QEP requirements. The QEP's SLO for information literacy states a student should be able to "identify and effectively evaluate essential supporting information and/or literature sources associated with a research project" (LSU, 2014, p. 19). This definition does not encompass the entirety of information literacy, but aspects of the assessment of the course must be directly linked to the definition since reports are submitted to the SACSCOC campus representative every fall and spring semester. To meet this assessment requirement, the course redesign had to contain clearly defined SLOs.

Therefore, the Committee began a systematic process to collectively rewrite all foundational aspects of the course by debating and designing the new SLOs. To give structure to the process, initially the entire Committee worked together to identify the broad goals for the course. Content was determined to revolved around four broad areas: identifying and developing a research topic; locating and finding resources; evaluating resources; and using and applying resources. Then, the Committee split up into two-person teams to rewrite these broad goals into SLOs and to draft the attributes that would fall under each outcome. This process encouraged backward design with the librarians asking what successful student would be able to do after completing the course. Through regular meetings, the Committee reviewed and revised the SLOs and attributes developed in the small teams. *Bloom's Revised Taxonomy* was used heavily throughout to scaffold learning toward higher order thinking. Once the draft SLOs were finalized, the Committee normed language to ensure consistency between items. At this point, the SLOs were nearly set with the exception of ensuring alignment with the *Framework*, which had been released just a few months earlier.

Results

The SLOs were based on concepts. As such, they allowed for the inclusion of the tools and skills as determined to be appropriate according to the individual instruction librarian. The figure below shows the SLOs produced during this process. Because the *Framework* was new, the Committee was still learning about it and experimenting with the frames. To make the transition to the frames explicit, purple font was used on all documentation to illustrate the connection between the frames, SLOs, and attributes. This illustration helped instruction librarians gain confidence and experience with the frames by clearly demonstrating how they aligned with the more approachable SLOs. Eventually, there will be a transition to solely using the frames.

1. Develop a research topic *{research as inquiry}*
 - a. Identify a topic area that interests you
 - b. Use appropriate sources to acquire a general understand and basic vocabulary
 - c. Develop a research question
 - d. Formulate terms
2. Identify and locate sources *{searching as strategic exploration}*
 - a. Select contextually appropriate information-seeking tools
 - b. Demonstrate effective searching
 - c. Choose and access appropriate sources
3. Examine concept of authority and evaluate sources *{authority is constructed and contextual}*
 - a. Describe differences between scholarly, peer-reviewed, and popular sources; as well as primary and secondary sources
 - b. Articulate authority, purpose, and timeliness of a source in relationship to a topic
 - a. Analyze the degree to which a resource is relevant to a topic
 - b. Apply evaluation criteria to choose best source(s) *{information creation as a process}*
4. Use information sources ethically
 - a. Articulate reasons for ethical use of information *{information has value}*
 - b. Demonstrate how to quote, paraphrase, and summarize information sources *{scholarship as a conversation}*
 - c. Cite information sources appropriately and consistently *{information has value}*
 - d. Articulate capabilities and constraints of sources based on perceived value, packaging, and format *{information has value}*
 - e. Reflect on role as a contributor in ongoing scholarly conversations *{scholarship as a conversation}*

Figure 1. Instruction Committee's SLOs. The purple font denotes each frame.

Benefits and Future Implications

The development of SLOs to support the *Framework* and the QEP provided a common language and foundation to support not only various librarians teaching for-credit instruction, but also the various methods of instruction coming out of the Research and Instruction department. The frames provided librarians more flexibility for thinking about and teaching information literacy. Since students develop, practice, and master these skills throughout their academic careers, information literacy instruction cannot rely on one class or exposure. The SLOs have the agility to serve as the foundation for all instructional services regardless of the mode. As a result, the SLOs could influence tutorials, discipline specific one-shots, consultations, and even faculty-directed outreach.

Working through this process step-by-step as a group helped the librarians to internalize a common language for talking about their instruction and for speaking with a more unified voice when liaising to departments and reaching out across campus. It also ensured that the librarians gained a clear understanding of how their instruction provided key support to the University's reaffirmation of accreditation. Since assessment used prior to the SLOs was not robust enough for QEP reporting, the SLOs have provided a path for librarians to develop improved assessment.

Throughout the redesign, the librarians have recognized that this process will continue to evolve with changes in the ecosystem in terms of instructional needs, University priorities such as accreditation, and librarians' internalization of the frames. SLOs have taken various formats in classes, from being used to structure content explicitly to serving as a guide. While the SLOs and attributes have been written and aligned with the *Framework*, the process remains ongoing and will be expanded to

include assessment. Thus far, the focus of this process has been internally-facing with the intention of formalizing the department's approach to instruction. Once a successful mode of assessment is developed, the librarians can use this data in a continuous loop; analyzing the results and then applying them to improve future instructional experiences.

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