Enhancing Student Research Skills: Information Literacy Stipends for 2016

Name:	Joshua Arp
Department:	Theology/Religious Studies
Email address:	josarhuap@aol.com
Phone #:	570.586.1016
Course name and number:	T/RS 121: Introduction to the Bible
Timeline:	Spring 2016
Name of Library Faculty Collaborator:	Prof. Donna Witek

Assignment Background

Since very few of my students claim to have an interest in taking the course, and many claim to have no background with the material, and since the course is an introduction to a primary source (i.e., the Bible), I have designed the course to be hands-on, with an initial shallow learning curve. There are two short papers assigned in the first month of the semester, and then there is a major paper due just before finals. There are no assigned topics for the first two papers, but the students must connect Bible study with their majors, their interests, or with issues that inspire or infuriate them. This allows students to investigate the Bible for themselves on terms of their own interest. For the final paper, all students are assigned the same Bible passage, and must do a more traditional Bible study, although they should point that study in a direction that interests them. In order to facilitate extended, quality work on the final paper, beginning five weeks before the paper is due, students must hand in four weekly installments documenting any progress on their paper. During this time period, some students meet with me to discuss the topic, logic, methodology, and resources for their study.

Research Background

The course's Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) require students to acquire and use information from the Bible. In order to achieve this outcome, students need to gain literacy not only in the Bible's primary source data, but also in appropriate secondary source data that will serve as the doorway into the primary source data. Here it is of paramount importance to me that the students work with the Bible as the primary source for this class. Yet with regard to primary and secondary sources, there are two risks. In this course, the more problematic risk is that secondary sources have the potential to displace the prominence of the primary source. A less problematic risk is that the students have a poor quality interaction with the primary source due to neglect of secondary sources. The reason this is a lesser risk is that the lectures themselves function as one type of secondary source, thus ideally mitigating some of this otherwise legitimate risk.

Library Background

Donna Witek worked with me as my librarian collaborator. Prior to her role as librarian collaborator for the Information Literacy project, Prof. Witek had already met with me. She learned the pedagogical strategy of my course and began to work with me to make some information literacy improvements. She helped to clarify and streamline the wording of course assignments, and she gave me productive feedback on the rubrics used for grading. Prof. Witek also agreed to host a library research lecture as part of my class. The library lecture included an explanation of how to use the online course-specific research guide Prof. Witek had developed for the students (http://guides.library.scranton.edu/theology/arp-trs121). The research guide also gives students online access to prompts for the assigned papers. Prof. Witek reviewed and made suggestions for improving the clarity and contents of these paper prompts. Additionally, when I

applied for the Information Literacy Stipend, Prof. Witek agreed to work with me as my librarian collaborator, continuing to improve the information literacy of the course.

Information Literacy Standards That Are Addressed:

The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) describes information literacy as "the ability to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information" (from http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/informationliteracycompetency).

Standard Three of the *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* is the most relevant information literacy standard for my assignments. It reads:

> The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system.

The most relevant performance indicators for achieving this standard for my assignments are performance indicators (PI) 1, 3, and 7:

> 1. The information literate student summarizes the main ideas to be extracted from the information gathered.
> 3. The information literate student synthesizes main ideas to construct new concepts.
> 7. The information literate student determines whether the initial query should be revised.

The Course SLO that specifically connects with the assignments for which I am seeking to raise information literacy is:

> Identify and analyze such key theological themes as creation, covenant, revelation, sin, and salvation as they are presented and developed in the Bible.

The research component of the course helps students to find these theological themes as discussed by secondary sources (PI 1), draw conclusions for themselves about the development of these themes (PI 3), or correct their initial, mistaken readings of the passage (PI 7).

Approach to Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

In a Bible research paper, there are two types of information implicitly sought in the SLOs: (1) Information from the Bible as a primary source, and (2) Information about the Bible found in secondary sources. However, students often incorporate information from a third source, personal experience, into the presentation of their research. Accurate assessment of the SLOs must only take the first two sources into account. Student biblical research can be quantified in the following ways, and these ways require students to find, evaluate, interpret, manage, and then use information: 1. Did the student use the Bible as a primary source? And did the student demonstrate an awareness of the Bible's internal character as a source of information? In other words, is the Bible cited, and is the citation studied and evaluated in its biblical and other contexts? 2. Did the student use secondary sources to enhance or validate the student's conclusions about the Bible's information? Here a second level of assessment can be raised: 3. Did the student use multiple secondary sources and critically compare and evaluate their contributions for enhancing or validating the student's conclusions about the Bible's information?

Information Literacy Stipend Adjustments

When I received the information literacy stipend, I met with Prof. Witek to begin implementing the proposal. The following are changes that I made:

1. We scheduled the library lecture to fall between the first two papers. This way students could "get their feet wet" with primary source study as a primer for their interest in getting help from secondary sources. Due to continued refinements encouraged through the information literacy stipend, for the second paper, I added a rubric category that requires the use of two secondary sources of the type and quality introduced in the library lecture and sourced in the research guide.

2. Several weeks later, I changed the requirements for the four weekly installments that preceded the major paper. I combined the grades and due dates for the second and third installments. This new installment is the research installment now worth 10% of the paper grade. For this new installment, students must create a brief annotated bibliography for their major paper. Not only do they list their sources, but they summarize the contribution of the sources to their specific research. Each source listed is now worth 1% of the paper grade, and each sentence-long source summary is also worth 1%.

3. In consultation with Prof. Witek, I have also added research strategy and critical analysis language to the rubrics used for grading the second paper and the major paper. For critical analysis, I used a paper Dr. Mary Goldschmidt circulated at a CTLE rubric workshop entitled "The Critical Thinking Rubric." My revised rubrics allow me to assess the three research-based papers to determine the extent of and quality of information literacy learning. Students now must not only use secondary research, but they must use it well and with good purpose.

4. With regard to the two research risks—too little or too much secondary source usage—I have solved this problem by creating two pathways on the rubric for the final paper. Students may or may not pursue secondary research other than class lectures for the major paper. This might seem to give them an opportunity to skip the secondary research. However, with the addition of the graded research installment, students have already been assigned to work with secondary literature, and they are less likely to avoid it in writing the final draft of their major paper.

Information Literacy Assessments and Achievements

1. It was my intention that the research and writing skills required for this class would be generalized for application across disciplines. I have already received student feedback that this desire is being fulfilled.

2. The rubric adjustment that requires secondary sources for the second paper is effective. There is now a marked improvement in the use and quality of research materials for the second paper.

3. Changing the installment requirements has been effective, and builds on the research skills of the second paper. By merging the second and third installments into one research installment, there is a logical structure and accountability for the research process. Students can now use the first installment to explore the intersection of the assigned text and their interests. Then they can open this inquiry up to secondary sources for their second installment, the annotated bibliography. For the third installment—the last before the final draft—students have the opportunity to merge their thoughts on their primary and secondary research. Additionally, because students have already had a research requirement for an earlier

paper, by the time they do their research installment, they have a level of information literacy on which to build.

4. Anecdotally, I affirm that the average level of information literacy, as evidenced through quality use of research, especially for the major paper, has improved since making changes specifically targeting information literacy.

5.Each semester, after the final exam, I assign a small, optional extra credit assignment. I ask the students to choose a Course SLO and explain how the outcome was achieved in the class. With few exceptions, students choose to write about the SLO mentioned in the above section "Information Literacy Standards That Are Addressed" as the one most relevant to information literacy.

Ideas for Continued Enhancement of Information Literacy

1. In Fall 2016, my scheduling required me to make two further adjustments. First, I made the library lecture available as a Panopto recording. Second, I created a biblical research PowerPoint presentation and corresponding Library research assignment. I am so convinced of the value of information literacy that I am considering devoting two or more lectures to biblical information literacy. With the additional time, the lecture material could be expanded to include discussions of critical thinking in research and creating quality, well-researched Bible studies. "Give a person a fish, and you give a day's meal. Teach a person to fish and you feed the person for a lifetime."

2. One way of increasing biblical information literacy would be to explicitly include material from the library lectures on the final exam and study guide. This way the students would know that they are being held accountable for the concepts.

3. Finally, I need to continue to tighten up the language of my paper prompts, my grading rubrics, and my enforcement of my rubrics. One way I can do this is to devote lecture time for teaching through the prompts and rubrics.