TO: Dean Charles E. Kratz, Dean of Library and Information Fluency, Weinberg Memorial
        Library
FROM: Meghan Ashlin Rich, Associate Professor, Sociology/Criminal Justice
RE: Information Literacy Stipend, 2014
DATE: February 10, 2015

Information Literacy Stipend Report
Sociological Theory, Fall 2014

Description:

    For an information literacy project in Sociological Theory (SOC 218; see Appendix A for syllabus), I proposed that I add a requirement to the final group project of a written literature review for each individual student. This literature review consisted of at least six (6) sources and an overview of the chosen theorist's body of work. One of my frustrations with students reading and understanding sociological theory is that they over-rely on secondary sources and even Wikipedia for their knowledge about a particular theorist. I have emphasized the importance of primary sources for theory so that we can work towards doing theoretical interpretation ourselves, rather than relying on others' interpretation of the literature. I required at least half (3) of the sources to be primary (allowing for the fact that much classical and postmodern sociological theory has been translated from a language other than English). The requirement required students to understand the difference between primary and secondary sources, to seek and acquire appropriate sources through various on-line databases, and practice writing a concise (4-5 pg.) literature review of a theorist we did not cover extensively within the course, complete with appropriate citations and list of references. The students were also required to provide an oral report of their chosen theorist with a group of 3-4 students (assessment of this requirement is not included in this report because it is a "regular" part of the course). The larger departmental goal for this project is to be able to assess students' information literacy and their ability to construct an appropriate literature review, a necessary skill for any social science and/or grant writing related occupation.

Student learning outcomes related to <u>Information Literacy Standards</u>:

    As sociological theory is created through "conversations" (some real and imagined), students must understand that theory is not created in a vacuum, but in relation to historical thought, historical political, cultural, and social conditions, and new discoveries in the field of social science and cultural studies. The literature review required students to situate their chosen theorist within a particular "school of thought" (if any) and investigate their major influences and, in turn, whom they influenced. As real historical figures, the student had to also determine if the theorist's body of work had influence on society at large (for example, Marx obviously had and continues to have a huge influence throughout the world). Lastly, the student had to demonstrate their own understanding of the theorist's writings and if they can be applied to their own interpretation of today's globalized society. From the Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education (2000), this project is related to the following skills: 1) "The information literate student defines and articulates the need for information," 2) "The information literate student accesses needed information effectively and efficiently," and 3) "The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected

information into his or her knowledge base and value system" (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2000).

Assessment plan to determine how student learning outcomes will be evaluated:

This project was assessed through an information literacy pretest, an information literacy in-class tutorial provided by Donna Witek, and a written paper. The paper was graded on a number of criteria: 1) quantity and quality of sources, 2) appropriate citations and reference list (ASA style), 3) how well sources are integrated into written content of paper, 4) how well sources are interpreted, 5) how well the theorist is situated in the larger conversation, interpreting their influence on the discipline of sociology and society, 6) how the theorist's work can be applied to contemporary society, and 7) spelling, sentence structure, and grammar.

Class Activities Related to Information Literacy Project:

On the first day of class, Donna Witek introduced herself and we briefly explained the theorist literature review group project and paper requirements for the semester. Students were required to fill out an online "pre-test" survey on their own time, which asked them to discuss briefly their knowledge of sociology and research using primary and secondary sources. All students but one filled out the pre-test by Sept. 3, 2014 (see Appendix B).

The students were provided detailed instructions and a grading rubric on D2L for the theorist literature review (see Appendices C and D). They were asked to join other students in selecting a theorist by Oct. 15, 2014, when Donna and I arranged for a one-hour tutorial with the students in WML 305/306. At this tutorial, Donna and I discussed the requirements for the assignment. Donna provided a background for what a literature review requires and introduced students to the information literacy website she created specifically for this course and assignment. The class then was able to do searches on classroom PCs while Donna demonstrated different search tools and research strategies. See: http://guides.library.scranton.edu/rich-soc218

Throughout the semester, we worked individually with students who had questions about their theorist or needed guidance regarding finding and selecting primary and secondary sources for their paper. A couple of students made appointments with Donna to meet with her and about four students spoke with me directly regarding their papers (out of a total of 15 enrolled students).

All the students in the course presented theorist group projects on the last day of class as well as turned in individual literature review papers. All but one student (the same student who did not fill out the pre-test) filled out the online "post-test" survey on their own time in between the final class day and the deadline of Dec. 13, 2014.

Assessment of Literature Review Paper:

Overall, the students received high marks in all assessment categories of the Literature Review Paper, which included: **Style, Sources, Sociological Context, Clarity of Argument**, and **Creativity** (see Appendix D for grading rubric for detailed categories). As explained above and in the Information Literacy proposal, we created the assessment rubric to reflect: 1) quantity and quality of sources

(**Sources**), 2) appropriate citations and reference list (**Style**), 3) how well sources are integrated into written content of paper (**Sources**), 4) how well sources are interpreted (**Sociological Context** and **Clarity of Argument**), 5) how well the theorist is situated in the larger conversation, interpreting their influence on the discipline of sociology and society (**Sociological Context**), 6) how the theorist's work can be applied to contemporary society (**Creativity**), and 7) spelling, sentence structure, and grammar (**Style**).

The average grade for the papers was 92.2, which reflects my positive impressions of most students' work (see Appendix E: Assessment Data). Although all students completed a theorist literature review that was the same as at least one other student, no student covered exactly the same theorist's literature in exactly the same way. While my comments on their paper question some "holes" in their literature review, my high grades recognized that it is very difficult to cover all of the major works of a theorist (such as Friedrich Nietzsche, for example) in a 4-5 page undergraduate paper. The high marks on this assignment also reflected the fact that this group of students was highly engaged and are overall strong students, excelling on other assignments in the course and in other courses that they have taken with me.

Assessment of Pre- and Post- Information Literacy Tests

Both Donna and I scored students' answers to the pre- and post- Information Literacy Tests and assessed their answers according to a "Novice," "Developing," or "Expert" understanding of information literacy in Sociology (see Appendix F: Information Literacy Pre/Post Test Assessment Sheet). We also noted their qualitative answers to question #9 of the post-test that asked them: "Of the things you learned in this course, what is one thing that surprised you, and why?" Donna compiled and compared our assessment data for this project, and although we had a very different range as far as assessment scores, we both saw a marked "improvement" regarding student mastery of information literacy (see Appendix E: Assessment Data). Donna's average scores across all questions ranged from 2.1 (Novice) to 2.4 (Between Novice and Developing) for the pre-test and 2.5 (Between Novice and Developing) and 3.1 (Developing) for the post-test. My average scores ranged from 2.6 (Between Novice and Developing) to 3.1 (Developing) for the pre-test and 3.0 (Developing) to 3.9 (Between Developing and Expert) for the post-test.

A sampling of their answers to question #9 are as follows:

"Seeing how different theories can all branch off from a single previous theorist."

"Many contemporary sociologists worked off of or continued the work of classical sociologists."

"I never knew most of these theorists had written so much different kind [of] theory. In previous sociology classes we just skimmed the surface on many of the theorists. This sociology class delved deeper into both the major and lesser known aspects and works of theory."

"One thing that surprised me in this course is how many theories are related. When I came into this class I thought that all theories would go against each other [and] try and prove each other wrong. But after

this semester I realize many of the theories build on each other and there are theorists that are still using some of the oldest theories made to explain the current society today."

"That all the theories are so interrelated and most of them cannot exist without the theories that came before them."

Conclusion/Reflection

Overall, I found the collaboration with Donna Witek to be very successful and hope to continue this collaboration in the future for SOC 218. Donna's expertise in information literacy and assessment helped to create a more assessable assignment through the information literacy online pre- and post-tests and the crafting of rubrics for both this test and the theorist literature review paper. She also gave my students a useful online research guide and "all-in-one" resource, which I know that they took advantage of. According to Donna, the research guide website was accessed 69 times during the Fall 2014 semester. Additionally, adding an individual literature review assignment (rather than just requiring a theorist group project) promoted students' understanding of the relationship between theorists/theories to each other, based in historical and social thought. This is a major piece of the course, but because they had to consider these connections on their own in their writing, the comments they wrote in response to post-test question #9 affirms my belief that this assignment furthers their understanding in this realm.

If I were to do anything differently next time, it is to work with Donna more closely before I do an assessment of the pre- and post-tests. She completed her assessment rubrics with a different perspective than I (which is expected, since she is an information literacy expert), but she also graded on a scale between 0-5, whereas I just "x"ed the section (Novice, Developing, or Expert) that I thought the answer fit, making a less nuanced final assessment. This is a small detail but one that will give us a better assessment comparison in the future. Regardless, we still found similar "improvement" in students' information literacy over the course of the semester.

Appendices:

    A) Syllabus for SOC 218, Fall 2014
    B) Information Literacy Pre- and Post-test
    C) Theorist Group Project Directions, Fall 2014
    D) Theorist Literature Review Paper Assessment Sheet
    E) Assessment Data (Literature Review and Pre-Post Tests)
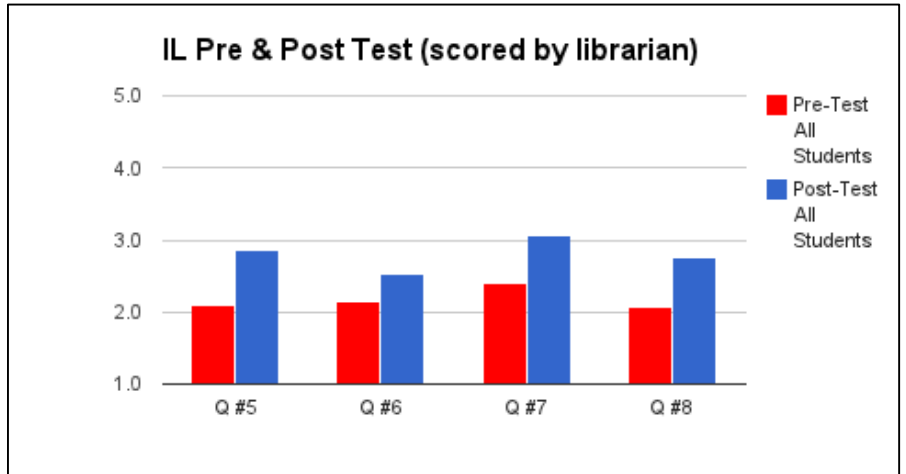   F) Information Literacy Pre/Post Test Assessment Sheet

Information Literacy Pre-Test for SOC 218: Sociological Theory (August 2014)

1) *Timestamp*
2) *Name:*
3) *Please provide your R Number.*
4) *I am a:*
5) *It's Thanksgiving, and a family member asks you what sociology is while passing you the potatoes. What are three things about sociology you can tell them?*
6) *You are reading something on the web and encounter the name of a sociological theory or theorist, and you want to learn more about it/her/him. What steps do you take to learn more?*
7) *In the discipline of sociology, a primary source about a theory is one written by the theorist who developed that theory. What are two reasons you might intentionally consult a primary source about a sociological theory?*
8) *A secondary source about a sociological theory or theorist is one written by someone other than the original theorist. What are two reasons you might intentionally consult a secondary source about a sociological theory and/or theorist?*
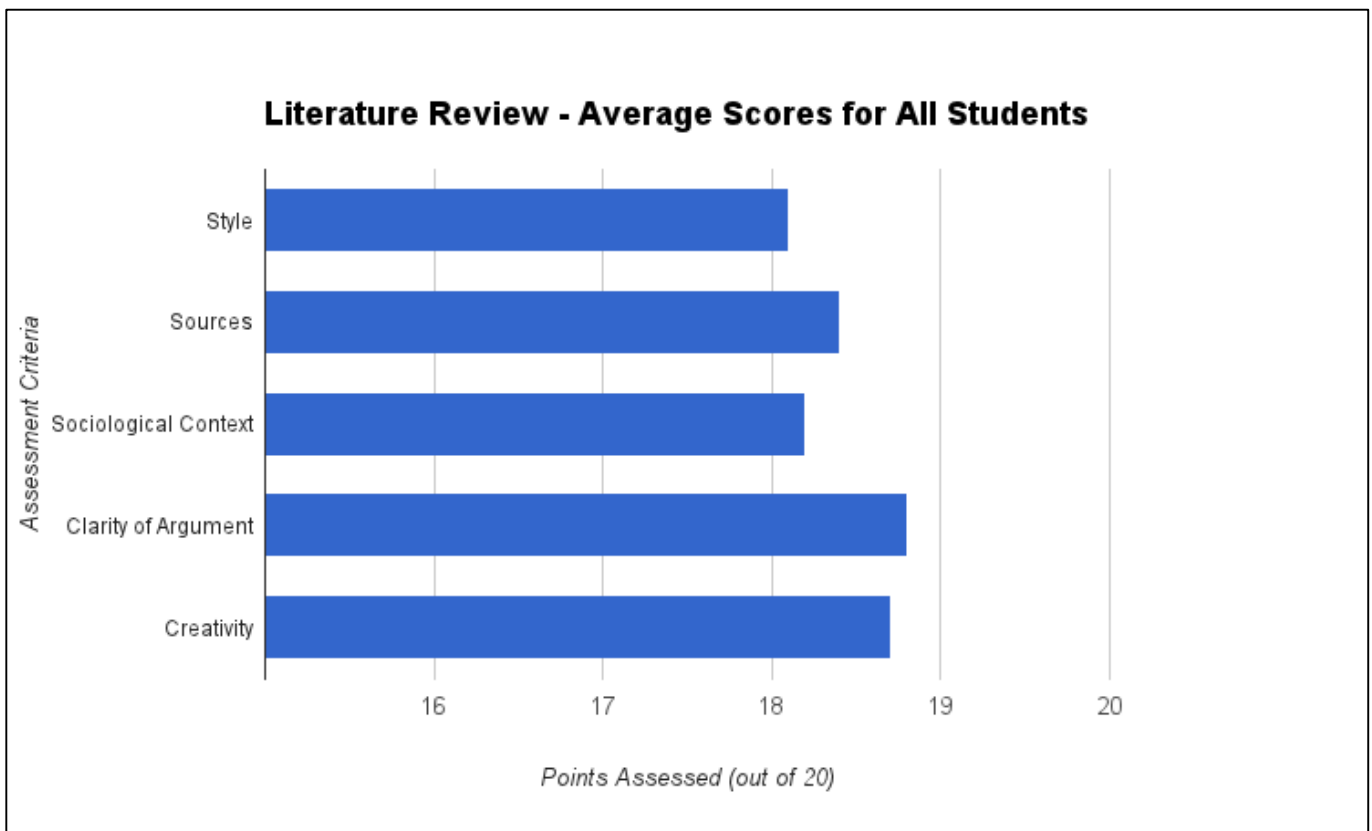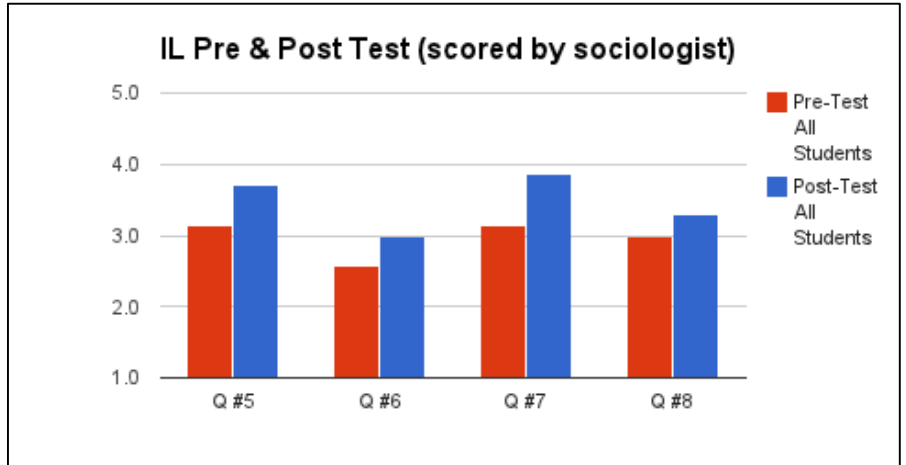9) *What do you expect and/or hope to learn in this course?*

Information Literacy Post-Test for SOC 218: Sociological Theory (December 2014)

1. *Timestamp*
2. *Name:*
3. *Please provide your R Number.*
4. *I am a:*
5. *It's Christmas (or other winter family holiday gathering), and a family member asks you what sociology is while passing you the green beans. What are three things about sociology you can tell them?*
6. *You are reading something on the web and encounter the name of a sociological theory or theorist, and you want to learn more about it/her/him. What steps do you take to learn more?*
7. *In the discipline of sociology, a primary source about a theory is one written by the theorist who developed that theory. What are two reasons you might intentionally consult a primary source about a sociological theory?*
8. *A secondary source about a sociological theory or theorist is one written by someone other than the original theorist. What are two reasons you might intentionally consult a secondary source about a sociological theory and/or theorist?*
9. *Of the things you learned in this course, what is one thing that surprised you, and why?*

IL Pre & Post Test (scored by librarian)		
	Pre-Test All Students (avg)	Post-Test All Students (avg)
Q #5	2.1	2.9
Q #6	2.1	2.5
Q #7	2.4	3.1
Q #8	2.1	2.8

IL Pre & Post Test (scored by librarian)

Pre-Test All Students
Post-Test All Students

IL Pre & Post Test (scored by sociologist)		
	Pre-Test All Students (avg)	Post-Test All Students (avg)
Q #5	3.1	3.7
Q #6	2.6	3.0
Q #7	3.1	3.9
Q #8	3.0	3.3

IL Pre & Post Test (scored by sociologist)

Pre-Test All Students
Post-Test All Students

Literature Review - Average Scores for All Students

Assessment Criteria: Style, Sources, Sociological Context, Clarity of Argument, Creativity

Points Assessed (out of 20)

F

SOC 218: Sociological Theory, Fall 2014
Information Literacy Pre/Post Test Assessment

Student Name: _____ **Check one:** Sociology Major [　]　Sociology Minor [　]　Neither [　]

Pre-Test (Aug 2014):

Question # and content area (knowledge) tested (including information literacy frame(s) addressed)	1 - Novice: superficial understanding of sociology and/or information literacy evidenced in response; reflects understanding of one untrained in sociology	3 - Developing: response evidences an increase in depth of understanding of sociology and/or information literacy; reflects understanding of an engaged student/apprentice of sociology	5 - Expert: expert understanding of sociology and/or information literacy evidenced in response; reflects understanding of a fully trained sociologist
#5 - scholarship as a conversation (three things about the discipline of sociology)			
#6 - research as inquiry/searching is investigative (how to research a sociological theory/theorist)			
#7 - primary sources/information creation is a process (two reasons to intentionally consult a primary source about a sociological theory)			
#8 - secondary sources/information creation is a process (two reasons to intentionally consult a secondary source about a sociological theory/theorist)			

Post-Test (Dec 2014):

Question # and content area (knowledge) tested (including information literacy frame(s) addressed)	1 - Novice: superficial understanding of sociology and/or information literacy evidenced in response; reflects understanding of one untrained in sociology	3 - Developing: response evidences an increase in depth of understanding of sociology and/or information literacy; reflects understanding of an engaged student/apprentice of sociology	5 - Expert: expert understanding of sociology and/or information literacy evidenced in response; reflects understanding of a fully trained sociologist
#5 - scholarship as a conversation (three things about the discipline of sociology)			
#6 - research as inquiry/searching is investigative (how to research a sociological theory/theorist)			
#7 - primary sources/information creation is a process (two reasons to intentionally consult a primary source about a sociological theory)			
#8 - secondary sources/information creation is a process (two reasons to intentionally consult a secondary source about a sociological theory/theorist)			

Comments (general and re: Q #9 on both tests-what do you expect/hope to learn? / what did you learn that surprised you?):