The Craft of the Historian (HIST 140)

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Project Summary: This grant was used to integrate an information literacy component into *History 140: The Craft of the Historian*, the department's required methodology and research course for sophomore majors. This course lays the foundation for future student research and helps develop student understanding of the work of historians. With this in mind, Kevin Norris, Library liaison to the department of History, and I developed a series of classroom exercises designed to develop students' information literacy skills. The success of these classroom sessions was measured in the short term through a pretest and post-test, as well as application of these skills into a series of subsequent writing assignments, including a major research paper.

Project Timeline:
Fall 2009: Kevin Norris and I met to discuss the course and student needs, and we developed a plan for two classroom sessions designed to aid students in wading through the sea of historical information available to them. We also developed questions for the student pretest and post test.

Spring 2010: Course was taught integrating the two library sessions and the student research papers. The library sessions worked to teach students.

1. The ability to locate historical sources online and within the library.
    a. Kevin demonstrated the online public catalog at the Weinberg Memorial Library as well as the databases most useful in historical research including "Historical Abstracts," "America: History and Life," "Credo," "ProQuest Central," "JSTOR," and "Historical New York Times."
    b. Students were also introduced to PLACI EZ-Borrow and interlibrary loan as a means to obtain works that were not available at the University of Scranton.
2. To evaluate the quality and reliability of any given source.
    a. During the library session Kevin and I discussed with the class how we determine the reliability of different sources. The discussion began with coverage of traditional peer-reviewed journals and monographs and ranged through online sources including Wikipedia and the Monticello online archives.
3. To recognize the difference between primary, secondary, and tertiary sources.
    a. Students were provided with a worksheet which listed various sources and were asked to label each as a primary, secondary, and tertiary source. We then came back together as a class and discussed the rationale behind each answer.
4. Teach students how to correctly format citations for electronic resources and journals in a bibliography.
    a. Students were introduced to the Chicago formatting style, the style most often used by historians.

Following these library sessions students were asked to write a brief reflection paper on where they might find sources for their end of the term research project. The language in these short papers demonstrated a strong understanding of the types of resources available to them as they moved forward. Building on this foundation students were also assigned an historiographic essay, which asked them to find and describe an academic journal article, an academic

monograph, a primary source and a website that related to their research topic. Finally, students were assigned a larger, research project in which they were expected to draw on what they had learned in the information literacy lessons. In addition to the actual paper students were required to present their findings to their classmates during formal class presentations, which included a discussion of the actual research process.

Assessment:
The pretest was given at the first library session before class began and the post-test in the first class after the library sessions. The pretest and post test included the following questions (results are listed below each question):

1. What is a primary source?
   a. Pretest correct: 10/18
   b. Post-test correct 18/18
2. What is a secondary source?
   a. Pretest correct: 10/18
   b. Post-test correct 18/18
3. What is the name of the style historians use in citing references?
   a. Pretest correct: 2/18
   b. Post-test correct 16/18
4. What is the difference between an academic and popular publication?
   a. Pretest correct: 7/18
   b. Post-test correct 17/18
5. How do you access the quality of information on a website?
   a. Pretest correct: 6/18
   b. Post-test correct 17/18

Analysis of Assessment: In all cases the tests indicate a level of improvement in student knowledge. While a reasonable number of students knew how to define primary and secondary sources coming into these sessions, the library component clearly helped all of the students improve their understanding of the differences in the types of sources. Knowledge of proper citation for historical research witnessed the greatest improvement as a result of these sessions and is a critical component in the development of students writing skills. These tests also suggest a great deal of improvement in student ability to judge the quality of sources. Another indication of the durability of this material was the overall quality of the student's historiographic essays. In almost every case students made strong choices in their selection of sources and offered strong analysis.

Conclusion:

Following the library sessions and through a continued integration of information literacy focuses assignments throughout the semester students demonstrated improvement in core information literacy competencies. Students enrolled in History 140 made better and more technical use of library resources, were better able to share discuss their research in writing and in the classroom, and demonstrated a deeper understanding the research process as a whole. I would like to thank Kevin Norris for his assistance in preparing these sessions and for his efforts in presenting them. I would also like to thank the library advisory sub-committee on information literacy for awarding me the literacy grant. My students took a great deal from these sessions and I look forward to doing this again.