

ACS Information Fluency Project Grant 2001

Integrating Information Fluency into the Humanities

Furman University

The grant participants (Mary Fairbairn, Melinda Menzer, Cort Haldaman and Madeline Clark) spent the early part of the summer exchanging information via e-mail and answering the following questions:

1. What do we think is wrong with the current Humanities Sequence?
Answers included: not enough student participation in the course, not enough guidance in writing an analytical paper, no research in the course, boring themes, no discussion of Islam, needs to be more interdisciplinary, rather than multidisciplinary, etc.
2. What do we think is going right with the current Humanities Sequence?
Answers included: good readings, good camaraderie, good to have multiple people with different perspectives lecture on the same text, makes students think, synthesize, find patterns.
3. What do we hope to accomplish from this collaboration?
Answers included: create a true collaboration among grant participants, find ways to produce more student interaction both inside and outside of the classroom, create a research project that teaches them both information fluency and writing skills, find technologies that will help increase communication, and many more...

After this preliminary work, we went on a retreat in the early part of July to delve into the course-revision more fully. We spent 3 days in Flat-Rock, NC brainstorming about ways to address the issues brought up in our previous e-mails to each other. We also included activities to help us get to know each other, including a trip to Chimney Rock. Much of the most interesting brainstorming actually happened during these recreational activities.

The weekend resulted in numerous ideas for improving the Humanities Sequence and incorporating Information Fluency into it. The next obstacle, however, lay in convincing the rest of the professors who taught the course with Dr. Menzer to accept and implement these ideas. Dr. Menzer met with the Humanities Steering Committee and presented our work from the summer, and they agreed to implement the following changes:

- Introduce Ms. Fairbairn and Ms. Clark on the first day of class as additional resource persons who will be participating in the class throughout the term.
- Use Blackboard to increase communication among participants in the course.
- Implement online discussions in Blackboard to supplement and expand the in-class discussions.

- Replace weekly in-class quizzes with online quizzes in Blackboard to increase class time that can be spent on discussion, while still ensuring that students are doing the reading.
- Implement a phased research paper for the class, in which students are taught in four stepped assignments how to write and how to research.
 1. The first step would be a close reading of a text, using "Annotator" from the University of Texas "Critical Tools" package. Students would select one of four texts, and then think about it and annotate it online, as part of a group.
 2. Step two is a response paper, in which students utilize both the close reading they did with the annotator project and writing techniques taught in class to produce a short paper on the text.
 3. Step three is an annotated bibliography of secondary sources. For this step, the librarian (Fairbairn) would use one class period to discuss the fundamentals of conducting research in the Humanities, and then be available as a consultant for the students' research.
 4. Step four synthesizes all previous steps, with the outcome being a final research paper on a text.

We are currently in the midst of teaching the course with the above-mentioned changes. So far, the response seems positive.

Mary Fairbairn (Librarian)
Melinda Menzer (Humanities/English Professor)
Cort Haldaman (Computing and Information Services)
Madeline Clark (Student)
Oct. 17, 2001