

ACS Integrating Information Fluency into the Humanities
Final Report
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Our project began with four goals. First, we wanted to incorporate research skills into the freshman Humanities sequence, a three-term course. Second, we hoped to encourage critical thinking in this population of first-year students. Third, we needed to foster communication and discussion over the year, in a course which had over 100 students and was taught by a team of ten faculty and four student teaching fellows. Finally, we planned to introduce the faculty and students to web courseware and evaluate its effectiveness.

In order to achieve these goals, we made three major changes to the course structure. First, we constructed the course around a progressive assignment that gradually built up students' information fluency skills. The assignment had four parts:

1. An Annotator assignment, which developed close-reading skills in a collaborative, interactive electronic environment
2. A response paper, which taught students to develop and defend a thesis based on textual analysis
3. An annotated bibliography, which asked them to use research to answer questions arising from their textual analysis and to evaluate sources
4. A research paper, which required them develop an effective argument, synthesizing the ideas of other scholars with their own analysis of the text

Second, we developed a Blackboard site to support the course, using ACS funds to pay for the site. This site allowed us to promote discussion online in small groups, increasing the discussion opportunities in the large, lecture-oriented class. We replaced in-class quizzes with online quizzes, thereby freeing up more in-class discussion time. Lecture outlines, readings, and supplementary materials were posted to the site, encouraging students to seek information online. In addition, we used the Announcements feature to communicate with students more effectively and without using up class time.

Third, we added a librarian to the teaching team. Mary Fairbairn, a member of our library faculty, introduced these 100 freshmen students to information search skills and provided technological support throughout the course. Mary's presence in the course decreased our students' fear of libraries and librarians and made them more willing to seek help when they needed it.

Our experience with the new freshman Humanities sequence was positive, although we did have problems come up. For example, we had more difficulty than we expected putting together online quizzes; in the midst of all the changes, we were unable to work out a system to meet and compose the quizzes. Fewer quizzes, therefore, were given than in past years, and, as a result, we are going to be considering whether they are a necessary component of the course. Plus, we worked the library session into the course in a time

that was convenient for the lecturers, but too early for the needs of the students, who would be doing the research over a month later; as a result, the students forgot much of what they had been taught before they had a chance to use it. The new research component, which unleashed 100 nervous (and forgetful) freshmen on the library at the same time, put a strain on the library's human and information resources; we had not considered the impact of having so many students research similar topics all at once. For next year, we will be thinking of ways to stagger the research assignment and/or vary the research topics so that the library can better accommodate this large group of students.

However, we were pleased with the expanded opportunities for discussion and the ease with which we were able to use Blackboard to put up lecture notes, readings, and announcements. The online lecture notes replaced our old handouts, dramatically reducing our copy budget and dependence on paper. We never had to come up with extras for students who had lost their copies or missed class. Furthermore, we were able to archive all the materials in electronic format, which should make it easier next year to make minor changes and post them again.

We were also pleased by the new progressive assignment. The students developed their close reading skills, learned to do research, and, for the most part, successfully synthesized the information they had found into a final paper. Developing these skills as freshmen will aid them in their courses at the university for the full four years and, we hope, in life beyond. The changes made them more active participants in their learning experience and helped them develop critical thinking abilities.

We want to thank the ACS for giving us the opportunity to improve this course sequence, which reaches so many of our students and Humanities faculty. As a result of the success of these changes, we are working to get our own Blackboard server and license and plan to continue to incorporate librarians and student teaching fellows into our Humanities courses.

Respectfully submitted,

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