

Information Fluency Instruction for First-year Students: a Team Approach

Final Report
April 7, 2003

The Olin Library has completed its "Information Fluency Instruction for First-year Students: a Team Approach" project. The grant proposal requested funds to pilot three team-taught sections of a one-credit Information Fluency course for first-year students. The purpose of the project was to determine the most appropriate method for introducing first-year students to information fluency skills and for providing a basic level of competency. Our ultimate goal was to incorporate information fluency into the Rollins College curriculum as a general education endeavor.

Two sections of the course were taught by teams composed of faculty from the Education Department, a librarian, a member of the IT department, and a student intern. The course was added as a requirement to introductory education courses. A third section, which was offered as an option to first-year Spanish language students, was not filled. The course content was based on the ACRL Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education. The course goals included:

- expressing a research question, problem or issue;
- determining the information requirements for the research question;
- locating and retrieving information in a variety of formats;
- evaluating relevant information and information sources;
- communicating information in writing and for presentation.

Taught in six sessions, the classes covered: Using Campus Computer Systems, Writing a Research Paper, Selecting a Research Paper Topic, Using APA Documentation Style, Identifying Scholarly Journals, Using Boolean Operators, Introduction to Selected Databases (ERIC, Education Index, Proquest, and PsycInfo) and Search Techniques, Designing PowerPoint Presentations, Evaluating Information Found on the World Wide Web, Legal and Ethical Issues Concerning Information, and Building Web Pages.

In the first section, students were required to develop an annotated bibliography and create a web page about their research topic. Pre- and post-tests were administered. On the pre-test fourteen students reported weak skills in web page design; three reported weak library skills and five reported neutral library skills; and thirteen reported weak knowledge of Boolean search skills. On the post-test for this group, fourteen students reported strong skills in web page design; thirteen reported strong library skills; and thirteen reported strong knowledge of Boolean search skills. Course evaluations demonstrated that students were most motivated by the "hand-on" portions of the course. All of the students found the class helpful and one responded, "I never thought I could do something like that."

The second section was co-listed with "Education Psychology." Students were required to write a research paper, give a PowerPoint presentation on their research topic, and put

their PowerPoint presentation into a web page. Student evaluations demonstrated that even though they were required to do a lot of work for a 1-credit course, they felt they learned a considerable amount of useful information and developed excellent skills. In the pre-test, most felt their computer skills were at the average level. A post-test revealed that they had developed strong skills in all information fluency areas and that they were much more comfortable with computers in general.

The project has been very successful in guiding our final decisions about IF instruction at the first year level. We drew the following conclusions for the future of IF instruction at Rollins College:

1. Team-teaching for Information Fluency is not a sustainable model for the library on a large scale. But, collaboration between faculty, library faculty, and IT staff is very important.
2. Requiring a 1-credit course is not an appropriate strategy for the library and IT department. Students learned a great deal, but found the additional requirement unduly burdensome in their first year. Scheduling became a problem and the two departments would not have enough staff to offer the number of sections required.
3. It was challenging to connect a course in IF to a content area. IF skills should not be taught in isolation.
4. Faculty instruction in IF is very important and many faculty are eager to participate in IF instruction.
5. The project led the faculty curriculum committee to recommend infusion of IF skills into the Rollins College Conference, a seminar class for first-year students.
6. The project raised awareness about Information Fluency on our campus and led the faculty curriculum committee to propose pre-testing and post-testing first year students on their IF skills.

A report on the project was given at the ACS symposium on Information Fluency in Atlanta by a team consisting of Giovanni Valiante, Assistant Professor in the Department of Education, Carolyn Carpan, Reference Librarian and Assistant Professor in the Olin Library, and Linda Watson, Webmaster, Office of Information Technology.