

Using Peer Mentors to Promote Information Fluency

Participants:

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Project URL: <http://info.wlu.edu>

The goal of this project was to redesign Management/Economics 203: Quantitative Models for Management and Economics (a required course for all accounting, economics and management majors) to incorporate formal training in information fluency taught by the professor, an information technology specialist, a reference librarian and paid student mentors. The mentors, chosen from among those students who had previously completed the course, have provided assistance both informally by holding scheduled hours in the Commerce School library and formally by leading workshops that introduced students to Excel, Minitab (a statistical package used in the course), and survey software. The librarian also held a workshop to introduce the students to the research process, searching databases, locating data, and evaluating sources. Materials placed on the course Web site by the professor, the librarian, the information technology specialist and the student mentors supplemented this formal training. Additional assistance was provided through individual contact with the librarian and mentors as the students worked through the steps of their research projects.

The term projects required students to prepare a literature review on a topic, develop a statistical model to test a hypothesis related to this topic, collect and analyze data used in the statistical model, present the findings both in a written report and in a presentation made to the class.

The student mentors reported that students sought their help mainly during their scheduled lab hours (39% of contacts). Other contacts were made by email (29%), chance meetings either on campus or in other classes (26%), and telephone contact at home (6%). The librarian noted a noticeable drop in the number of questions coming to him from students in the class making this course much easier to support than in prior years.

Student evaluations noted that the assistance from the student mentors was the best feature of the class, followed by the support received through the Web site developed for the course. 36% of the assistance sought by students in this class was for assistance with their research. 33% of the assistance was for help with the software applications used in the course. The remainder of the help sought was for the course assignments not related to the term paper

Washington and Lee University's ACS Information Fluency Grant Project:

(31%). Thus the mentors' time was split fairly evenly between assisting students in finding information, working with the data, and helping with the course content.

A more extensive evaluation of the project is currently being done, but it can definitely be stated that this project was quite successful. Many areas of improvement have been identified and will be enumerated in the final report. Of these, the top areas are the more thorough integration of information fluency skills into the course assignments and having student mentors assigned primarily to individual sections of the course rather than having them all assigned to all sections. This will help students registered in the course to more easily recognize and approach the mentors and help the mentors keep better informed about what is happening in class.

This project has been selected for presentation at the 2002 EDUCAUSE National Conference in October.