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A collaborative voyage to improve students' career information literacy

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Like ships passing in the night, hospitality educators and library faculty have been trying to achieve the same goals, while using different language to describe their desired outcomes. Several studies (Brownell, 2004; Chung-Herrera, Enz & Lankau, 2003; Raybould & Wilkins, 2005) have found critical thinking to be an essential competency for hospitality management graduates' success as managers. At approximately the same time that hospitality educators were studying what they tend to label as critical thinking, librarians were studying what they labeled as information literacy. However, only one researcher in the hospitality field has published scholarly research on the specific topic of information literacy, (Sigala, 2002; Sigala & Cristou, 2003), and that research focuses on information and technology literacy without explicitly discussing critical thinking. Until recently no discussions of critical thinking and its relationship to information literacy have entered the library sciences literature (Albitz, 2007).

For years hospitality educators and instructional librarians have been using different terms to address the same concerns – students' lack of skill in effectively locating, accessing, evaluating and using information to make effective decisions. These are the hallmarks of both information literacy and critical thinking. It is time that these two strands of research and education came together in the interest of making our students more "information literate critical thinkers" (Albitz, 2007, p. 107). Hospitality faculty as disciplinary experts and library faculty, who are information experts, must collaborate to integrate both critical thinking and information literacy into the hospitality curriculum. The purpose of this presentation is to describe how a traditional collaboration between a librarian and a member of the hospitality teaching faculty grew into a richer student research assignment involving a non-traditional partnering to improve students' career information literacy.

Levels of Collaboration

Asper (2002) and Hollister (2005) each describe several possible forms of librarian-faculty collaboration, from the least involved level of outreach to "true collaboration" (Asper, 2002) or partnership (Hollister, 2005). At level one, outreach activities may be either faculty-initiated or librarian-initiated and often begin by the librarian identifying a faculty member who would be willing to work with the librarian in collection development by recommending materials of interest, which the librarian then locates and acquires. The second level of collaboration, building liaison relationships, has been widely discussed in the literature (Cohen, 1995; Macaluso & Petruzzelli, 2005; Wu, Cowman, Gardner, Sewell & Chung, 1994). Both Hollister (2005) and Asper (2002) identify instruction as the third level of teaching faculty-librarian collaboration.

The final level on the ladder of collaboration is "true collaboration" (Asper, 2002) or partnership (Hollister, 2005), in which the teaching faculty-librarian partnership consists of both parties being mutually involved in designing, delivering and assessing a unit of study with the teaching faculty as subject matter expert and the librarian as expert in information literacy (Asper, 2002). Mattessich and Monsey (1992) define collaboration as "a mutually beneficial and well-designed relationship entered into by two or more [individuals or] organizations to achieve common goals" (as cited in Cook, 2000, p. 23). Cook (2000) builds upon this definition by identifying three basic components of collaboration: (1) the

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purpose of collaboration is to achieve common goals, (2) collaboration is supported by a well-designed structure and (3) collaboration is mutually beneficial (p. 23).

THE STORY OF OUR EVOLVING COLLABORATION

While our librarian/hospitality faculty member collaboration definitely had a common goal (to improve students' career information literacy) and we found our collaboration to be mutually beneficial, our collaboration did not have a well-designed structure. The collaboration evolved organically from an instructional problem and outside the prescribed structure of liaison librarians established by our libraries; this is what makes it non-traditional.

Our partnership began in response to the libraries' outreach efforts. When one hotel faculty member started teaching a revised TCA 201: Career Development, she requested a library instruction session to help students better use the libraries' databases and other web-based resources to conduct career research. For the first three semesters our collaboration included the outreach and instruction levels. There was no link between what the faculty member thought would be useful for the students to know, and an assignment to assess whether the students had learned and could apply the library instruction.

Subsequently, the faculty member designed and implemented an information interview assignment (Bolles, 1997), in which students talked to a professional currently employed in a position to which the student aspired. Unfortunately, the faculty member failed to share the assignment with the instructional librarian, thereby missing another opportunity to more clearly align the library instruction with the students' course assignment. As a result, the students' assignments still lacked the level of critical thinking about their careers that we wanted them to apply to the assignment. The head of the libraries' instruction department and the hotel faculty member met to consult, which is Hollister's (2005) level four form of collaboration, on how we could make the assignment more focused on clear learning outcomes that made information literacy an integral part of the assignment. We redesigned the assignment from an informational interview to the first version of the Three Questions Assignment (See Appendix A). The revised assignment required students to develop research-based and strategically-relevant questions to ask employers during a selection interview so the students could determine the fit between their career plans and their employer's mission, vision, and strategic plans.

Two and a half years after we began our librarian-faculty collaboration, a professional success program coordinator in Career Services began teaching the course as a part-time instructor. In addition to her professional expertise she brought access to Career Services' resources including databases, online recruitment, and assessment inventories. With her fresh perspective, we developed a rubric to facilitate grading the assignment and made additional revisions to the assignment to assess the effectiveness of the more course-integrated library information session.

THE PRODUCT OF OUR COLLABORATION

The product of our non-traditional collaboration was the development of a non-traditional research assignment. In the Career Development course students are assigned a brief reflection paper called the Three Questions Assignment. The goal of this assignment is to allow students to apply what they have learned about industry research from the library session. The end product allows us to have a qualitative way to measure the effectiveness of the library instruction session. The brief reflection paper asks students to write three company-research informed questions to potentially ask during their selection interview that will allow them to accurately assess the fit between their values, mission, vision and strengths and those of the organization. The three questions must incorporate at least three citations gathered from their company research. The assignment is graded based on three criteria – questions allow accurate assessment of fit, questions demonstrate thoroughly conducted company research, and the paper clearly describes decision for accepting or declining the position offered.

FROM THIRTY-PAGE PAPERS TO AUTHENTIC ASSIGNMENTS

Faculty throughout campus and the instructors engaged in the development of this assignment are motivated to revisit and rework the traditional term paper assignment by a variety of concerns and experiences. One impetus for change is the rapidly evolving research environment. The sheer volume of information, particularly information in electronic formats, can produce information overload and anxiety in student researchers. Additionally, the new formats demand new approaches. The controlled vocabulary search is rapidly becoming obsolete and with this change comes both opportunities for very sophisticated search techniques and also the frustrations of messy, unfocused searches. Faculty frustration with student work products is one of the other main triggers for the revision of traditional paper assignments. Student research work demonstrates misunderstood or unmet expectations and, sometimes, a crucial lack of prior knowledge and skill development. Class sizes at many institutions are becoming prohibitively large for genuine feedback and grading of traditional research projects. The rise in plagiarism, whether it is intentional or the result of uninformed students, is another motivator for instructors to get creative in their assignment development.

The response of some faculty to these concerns is the elimination of research assignments, but librarians at UNLV feel that this is not the only alternative. The librarians continue to partner with more forward-thinking faculty to create activities or assignments that ask students to demonstrate both relevant content knowledge and also crucial embedded research or information literacy skills. One approach is to tease out the embedded research expectations of the faculty member and to select only one or two specific expectations that might be "tested" by a given assignment. For example, the instructor expects the student to begin work on her research paper by becoming familiar with the literature of the discipline. The student must make differentiations - among

those sources that target a general audience, those that might be written for practitioners, and those authored by and for scholars. Rather than hoping that this ability is evidenced somehow in a 30-page research paper, an instructor can develop an easy-to-grade assignment that asks students to demonstrate only one competency: the understanding of what the information of the discipline looks like. Similarly, assignments can be created that focus on asking the student to develop and demonstrate skills in finding, evaluating, understanding the associated ethical issues, and applying. Not every research assignment must demand comprehensive demonstration of knowledge and skill.

Librarians have a unique perspective on students' approach to research. Our interactions at the reference desk allow us a glimpse into the Millennials' reasoning around information gathering and processing. Combining the talents of librarians and instructors with some general design guidelines can produce interesting research assignments. In the case of UNLV's Career Development course, a traditional faculty/librarian interaction around a one-shot class session grew into a true and non-traditional partnership.

Articulating the desired learning outcomes was our first step. Students needed to be able to effectively conduct company and industry research and to analyze the results of their research in conjunction with their coursework. We wanted the assignment to have real world applicability to mirror the other course assignments and the very nature of the course. As the assignment was being developed, the course enrollment cap was raised, so designing an assignment for a large enrollment course was also important. In talking about why students needed to be versed in company and industry information we came upon the idea of asking students to develop informed questions they would ask at a job interview.

RESULTS

Pre-and post-tests were administered to the students in TCA 201 Career Development before and after a library instruction session in order to gauge their understanding of some concepts for industry research. The test consisted of five questions covering basic knowledge students would need to successfully complete the Three Questions research assignment. This basic knowledge included topics such as how to properly read citations and how to identify resources that would yield the required information.

The number of correct answers was averaged each semester for the pre- and post-tests. The pre-tests for Fall 2006 and Spring 2007 semesters were 1.53 and 1.66 respectively. The post tests for Fall 2006 and Spring 2007 were 2.68 and 2.096 respectively. The results suggest there was an increase in the knowledge gained after the students participated in the library information session.

Averages by question were also calculated to gain a better sense of the concepts that were more difficult for the students to grasp in order to improve our instruction for future

workshops. The most significant improvements in student knowledge from the pre-test to the post-test involved questions about techniques on how to search databases using truncation or Boolean operators, and knowledge about the types of resources that would yield the best research.

The number of students in the Fall semester dramatically increased from 39 to 80 students in the Spring semester. This may have affected the information conveyed during the library instruction session due to the need to split the class into two groups to accommodate them in library classrooms. Each librarian's teaching styles varied and thus affected how the information was delivered and ultimately, individual students' comprehension. Another potential limitation is that 46% of the class in Fall 2006 and 26% of the class in Spring 2007 did not consider English their first language. That semester, 47.9 percent of students enrolled in The College of Hotel Administration were international students (K. Young, personal communication, April, 23, 2007).

In Fall 2006 the average score on the assignment was a 26 (out of a possible 30, range 0 to 30). In Spring 2007 the average score was a 24 out of a possible 30, range 0 to 30). The lower average in Spring could be due to the increase in the class size to 80 from 39 the previous semester.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Over the course of our collaboration, we identified through our experience and verified in the literature, at least three possible barriers between teaching faculty and librarians who wish to embark on a collaborative non-traditional partnering to improve students' information literacy – language, power, and institutional support. First, faculty tend to speak of critical thinking while librarians speak of information literacy (Albitz 2007). Though these two concepts are distinctly different, they are related. As Klusek and Bornstein (2006) point out, "critical thinking and communication are the core concepts of information literacy" (p. 5). Brevik (2005) agrees: "a person who is information literate specifically uses critical thinking to negotiate our information-overloaded existence" (p. 23). To foster collaboration, librarians may need to rethink the language they use in describing with they do in the library classroom and to focus on finding common ground in mutually desirable learning outcomes.

Second, unfortunately, institutions of higher learning are very stratified, and real power and status differences are deeply rooted. "If we as instruction librarians were entrusted with the full spectrum of what is by right our curriculum too, we would be partners with our course-instructor colleagues in teaching the higher-order cognitive skills". (Quintiliano, 2005) a librarian wrote to the editor of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, in response to Wilder's (2005) critique of information literacy as the "wrong solution to the wrong problem facing librarianship" (p. B13). Until Quintiliano's (2005) vision becomes reality, librarians who want to collaborate with faculty beyond the one-shot instructional

session may have to make the initial relationship-building move. As Neal (2005) suggests, librarians "must become agents of literacy and information understanding .... and leverage [our] assets as entrepreneurs in the information marketplace" (p. B23).

Finally, until institutional support in the form of resources and rewards for faculty prove that information literacy is an institutional priority, librarians will continue to experience challenges in collaborating with faculty to design, develop and implement integrated instructional strategies for developing students who are more "information literate critical thinkers" (Albitz, 2007, p. 107).

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APPENDIX A

TCA 201 Three Questions Assignment

The assignment

1. Write three company-research informed questions to ask during your interview that in combination will allow you to accurately assess the fit between your values, mission, vision and strengths and the organization's values, mission, vision and strengths.

2. Write a brief reflection paper describing how the answers to your three questions will help you decide whether to accept the position if it is offered to you.

Criteria for questions

- three questions combined allow you to accurately assess the company's values, mission, vision and strengths
- three questions indicate student has conducted thorough company research using multiple sources (Internet, published materials, and personal interviews
- brief reflection paper clearly describes how recruiter's answers to questions will help student make an effective career decision

Grading Rubric

	Excellent 10-8	Acceptable 7-6	Unacceptable 5 or less
Questions allow accurate assessment of fit (10 points maximum)			
Questions demonstrate thoroughly conducted company research (10 points maximum)			
Paper clearly describes decision for position offered (10 points maximum)			