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Don't drown — Catch the wave: Instruction at the Valley Library

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Don't Drown— Catch the Wave: Instruction at the Valley Library

by Paula McMillen, PhD, Acting
Instruction Coordinator

As many readers will no doubt be aware, librarians at OSU have done one-to-one and classroom instruction for many years. However, as the information landscape changes, so do the students' needs for learning how to navigate that ever-changing landscape. The rapidly increasing migration of print resources to electronic form removes many of the contextual and visual cues that alerted earlier users to the authority, accuracy, comprehensiveness, point of view, or other indicators by which to judge the quality of information sources. As the experts in the organization, access, and dissemination of information, librarians have stepped forward to teach students how to be more "information literate"—that is, how to locate, evaluate, and use information effectively and efficiently, fostering OSU graduates to be competent life-long learners.

Library Instruction Program Goals

Increasingly, accrediting bodies, state boards of higher education, and large university systems (e.g., California State University and State University of New York) are adopting information literacy competence requirements for graduation. Our long-range goal is to develop a fully articulated program of library instruction, integrated throughout the entire undergraduate curriculum. One of our major efforts towards this goal is our two-year-old collaboration with the English composition (Writing 121) program in which librarians provide two



Reference librarians Jeanne Davidson (left), Sue Goodson, and Paula McMillen are part of a crew of instructors that teach research skills to OSU students.

sessions of instruction in support of student research for an "argument" writing assignment. Students are introduced to a variety of resources, both print and electronic, taught the basics of searching in electronic databases, guided in becoming more critical evaluators of information, and generally introduced to the research process.

We have also worked with the coordinators of the Writing 121 program to begin a broad-based assessment of information literacy among our students. In conjunction with a multi-institutional program developed by the Kent State University Library and endorsed by the Association of Research Libraries, all students in Writing 121 complete an online survey addressing five aspects of information literacy articulated by the Association of College & Research Libraries. In the future, we hope to involve more upper division students in this study as a way to gauge whether the undergraduate curriculum is equipping our graduates with the skills they need to effectively find and use information.

An additional step is to increase librarians' contact with writing intensive curriculum faculty and courses since we see the research and writing processes as similar in many ways—they are iterative processes and our skills at both can continually improve with practice and good feedback. Eventually we would like to collaborate with those faculty teaching required sequences of courses within the disciplines.

Opportunities for Collaboration

Reference librarians are a resource for faculty and students. We can consult on research projects, help develop effective assignments for achieving learning outcomes, develop guides for assignments, and teach sessions with classes to help students utilize the library—and information—more effectively. To learn more, see our Instruction Services webpage at <http://osulibrary.oregonstate.edu/instruction> or contact a subject librarian at <http://osulibrary.oregonstate.edu/staff/sublist.html>. ☒