**Problem**

Web-scale discovery systems make it quicker and easier to find library resources. However, some content is difficult or impossible to find without using specific resources, especially in business research.

**Hypotheses**

H1: Students will not use appropriate sources if they do not look in the right databases/resources.

H2: Having students start by evaluating the resource on the whole will be a good first step in evaluating individual sources.

**Method**

Setting

Upper-class business undergraduates were tasked with writing a 7-10 page group research paper on ethics and technology or computing.

Most students said they had not written a research paper in college.

I had two 45 minute visits, one in the middle of the semester and one a week before the due date.

Part of the first visit involved evaluating databases based on the professor’s source requirements:

- 7 references
- 3 professional/trade or scholarly
- 2 from the ACM (Association for Computing Machinery) portal

Method

I analyzed the review worksheets each pair submitted for 2 sections (Fall 2016 and Spring 2017), and analyzed the bibliographies of the Fall 2016 section’s final papers.

Below is an example of a finished review:

**Bibliographic Citation Analysis**

**Sources Used**

- High reliance on popular sources
  - In 3 papers, popular sources made up 50% or more of the bibliography

- Varying types of scholarly sources
  - About half of the scholarly sources were student or conferences papers

**Citations**

- Only 8% of citations were correct or almost correct (small punctuation errors)
- 3 papers had 0 correct citations

**Discussion: Students struggled with...**

**Identifying Sources**

- Struggled to identify the specific type of online article
- Some believed all sources in library databases were scholarly/academic

**Evaluating Sources**

- Did not seem to grasp the idea that not all sources are equal and some are better for certain needs
  - Op-Ed vs. Traditional hard news
  - Corporate sponsored content

**Formatting Citations**

- Most used citation generators and did not check for errors
- Sources were cited inconsistently within papers
- Sources were often incorrectly identified

**Advanced Database Use**

- Advanced search options were confusing
  - Shows need for database instruction

- Found refining cumbersome and unnatural
  - Counter to assumption of ease at navigating because digital native

**Changes for Spring 2017**

I was given twice the amount of class time.

**Lesson Adjustments**

- Took time in class to go over the database reviews, gently correcting mistakes.

- Added more emphasis on identifying and evaluating individual sources
  - Video on the information cycle
  - Discussion of source type characteristics and uses – framed with “Format as a Process”
  - Online interactive quiz practicing identifying and evaluating real sources

**Recommendations and Conclusions**

**Recommendations**

This activity might work better when the databases contain vastly different content, rather than mostly articles.

Reading the student’s papers and bibliographies is a good way to improve instruction.

**Conclusions**

H1: While mostly true, the students did not seem to care about which resource they used, unless required to use a specific database or resource.

H2: My idea of focusing on the databases was predicated by the belief that it is the first step to finding good sources. But, if students can’t evaluate sources within a good database, they still won’t use appropriate sources.

In order for students to use appropriate sources, they need to be able to understand what sources are appropriate, and how to find, identify, and evaluate them. Designing a lesson that includes various activities aimed at each of these steps is likely to yield better results than focusing on one aspect.

**Supplemental Materials**

For references, the course LibGuide, and full lesson plans, visit the Virtual Conference site.