Critically Analyzing Information: What do first-year students need to know?

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Background: Each year, the University Library System (ULS) provides over 70 library sessions to students enrolled in FP0001: Introduction to the Arts and Sciences. These sessions present a valuable opportunity to introduce foundational library and information literacy skills to first-year students that can be applied to almost any academic endeavor. Project leaders utilized evidence based curriculum development to create a more relevant and engaging 2017 library session, going beyond the traditional library orientation.

Assessment Collection, Data, and Impact

2016 Library Assignment Scores
A sampling of 200 submitted student assignments indicated:

- 91.2% were competent in keyword searching
- 89.6% were able to find a book on the shelf
- 86.8% were able to examine and compare information from various sources in order to evaluate reliability, validity, accuracy, authority, timeliness, and point of view or bias

Impact on the 2017 Lesson:
- Less focus on keyword development and finding materials
- More focus on comparing and analyzing information sources

HEDS (Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium) Research Practices Survey: HEDS Consortium, is an independent not-for-profit corporation. The survey collects information on students’ research experiences and assesses their information literacy skills.

The 2016 Library Class Information Literacy Indicators related to the HEDS survey were:
- Deciding which information is relevant for the assignment
- Knowing when to cite
- Knowing how to cite
- Knowing the best techniques for using resources to find information
- Deciding what resources to search for information (databases, search engines, etc.)
- Evaluating information for credibility, bias, authority, and appropriateness for the assignment

These indicators were used to survey FP0001 instructors

2016 FP0001 Instructor Survey
According to FP0001 instructor respondents, the top four information literacy skills first-year students lack are:

- 83.3% Evaluating information for credibility, bias, authority, and appropriateness for the assignment
- 52.1% Deciding what resources to search for information (databases, search engines, etc.)
- 47.9% Knowing when to cite
- 39.6% Knowing how to cite

Impact on the 2017 Lesson:
- A re-designed lesson focusing on identifying information need and finding the resources to support various information needs
- A new handout including information about when and how to cite

What is Information Literacy?
The American Library Association defines Information Literacy as "a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information."

These standards have been developed into a framework with 6 threshold concepts. The threshold concept that most closely relates to the FP0001 library sessions is Authority is Constructed and Contextual.

Summary and Future Plans
Through this assessment, improvements to the lesson not only allowed for more class time to focus on evaluating information, but introduced students to a wider variety of information sources while encouraging them to think critically about how they seek and understand information.

A similar process for the 2017 lesson has begun, seeking instructor feedback on current lesson information literacy objectives and presentation, as well as student performance with the updated lesson.

Recommended readings:
