Blending the old with the new: Methods for modernizing a credit-bearing research skills class

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1. Does your library offer a credit-bearing information literacy class?

A. Yes, a general class
B. Yes, a course-specific class
C. Yes, a grad-level class
D. Any of the above
E. None of the above
2. How do you or your colleagues deliver instruction?

A. In person
B. Via a social network
C. Via a learning management system
D. Any of the above
E. None of the above
3. What methods do you or your colleagues use while teaching?

A. Lecture
B. Student-led discussions
C. Hands-on activities
D. Any of the above
E. None of the above
4. Do you think ebook readers will replace print?

A. Not over my dead body
B. Within 3 years
C. Within 5 years
D. Only if they give me one
E. The sooner the better
We developed the course to address . . .

- Tufts president’s emphasis on undergraduate research
- Observed lack of library research skills on the part of thesis writers
- Interest on the part of library staff
- Unwavering support from library administration to offer more than the one-shot
- Proven success of credit-bearing courses
The framework of the course

- ½ credit, ½ semester, pass/fail
- Blackboard
- Intermediate to advanced search techniques and resources
- Follows a traditional path of how research is conducted, but is tailored to individual topics
  - Topic development, finding and evaluating sources
- Presentation (in PPT or poster) of research log and annotated bibliography as final project
- Assessment is a constant
  - Class discussion, assignments, presentations, etc
In with the new, out with the old, or vice versa?

- Traditional lectures have been dramatically reduced and almost always include visuals
- Self-assessment on week 1
- Hands-on exercises
  - Evaluation of resources
  - Concept map
  - Searching for resources
  - What is information
  - RefWorks
- Students as teachers
- “Fun” tools are re-characterized as resources
Faculty panel offers added value

- Students hear from faculty on
  - Formulating research questions
  - Research methods that do and don’t work
  - Managing information overload
  - Resources they use
  - How to make contacts
1. Background on the topic

2. Databases and search strategies

3. Misadventures and A-ha!

4. How my research skills have changed

5. Goals for continued research

Samara Watkiss 2008
Based on Library catalog searches

**Subject Headings**

- Intercultural Communication (in art)
- Visual communication
- Visual perception
- Art and society
- Art -- Psychology
- Visual communication -- Social aspects
- Visual sociology
- Visual anthropology
- Indians -- Languages -- Writing
3. Misadventures and A-ha!

From the beginning of this project I had an idea that there must be literature about the spreading or imposing of cultural ideas and values of the developed western world in less developed countries. I spent several weeks unsuccessful searching as I tried out different combinations of terms trying to get at what I had in mind. “Cultural colonialism,” was not right, nor was “post colonial theory,” or “cultural imposition.” Finally, in reading an abstract I came across the term “Cultural imperialism,” and that is the term for which I had been looking. Shortly thereafter I discovered that the thesaurus tool provided by CSA would have given me the correct term in a matter of minutes. Lesson learned.
4. How my research skills have changed

The biggest change in my research skills over the past eight weeks is my increased awareness of all of the different kinds of information available. I also am beginning to develop a sense of which type of search or database is most likely to bring back relevant results for a given topic. In particular, learning how to use the Thesaurus function in databases and Boolean logic to conduct searches is very useful. I have also discovered how easy interlibrary loan is, especially for electronic resources. Finally, learning about the existence of refworks and then how to use it has been amazing.
5. Goals for continued research

I hope to continue to improve my strategy for tracking my research. Using the research log has been a great improvement over not keeping track of where my sources come from at all, but I find it cumbersome. It assumes that all searches have the same beginning of choosing a database, but in reality I find I often following links from databases, to journal archives, to websites and then back to databases. I am going to work on a system that allows me to track my search strategy and the database I use directly in Refworks so I have access to it at all times and do not have to maintain a separate document.
“to learn how to prioritize resources. It still seems like an overwhelming amount of information. For instance, there are so many different databases that I often don't know where to start.”

“a research project–specific library tour helpful, just to get a physical sense of where things are located.”