Expected Outcomes: Auburn University Libraries Instruction Program

The Libraries’ Instruction Program will institute in-class assessments of key information literacy learning outcomes targeted in second semester English Composition (ENGL 1120) courses. These include skill sets related to (1) critically evaluating information sources and (2) effectively searching library databases (e.g., identifying relevant key concepts and alternate terminology that describe a research topic).

Assessment methods

Method: Informal and formal student learning assessments

During Fall 2011, library faculty were required to conduct at least two informal learning assessments during their library instruction sessions. The majority of faculty used a quick “muddiest point” or “one minute paper” at the conclusion of instruction sessions. A workshop was held in December 2011 to discuss findings from these exercises. At this workshop, faculty members were also introduced to formal assessment methods that had been pilot tested by members of the Instruction Team during the previous year. These featured student worksheets completed during in-class exercises related to (1) evaluating print and web resources and (2) identifying keywords and alternate terminology related to a research topic. Beginning Spring 2012, library faculty were required to conduct two informal student learning assessments and two formal student learning assessments each semester, using the worksheets presented in the workshop or some other assessment method of the faculty member’s own choosing.

Findings:

At the Fall 2011 workshop, library faculty discussed the results from the informal assessments (e.g., “muddiest point” and “one minute paper” assessments). The most frequently recurring question/observation from students related to difficulty in formulating a paper topic. In Spring 2012, library faculty met at the end of the semester to discuss what had been learned from the formal assessments conducted with student worksheets. Library faculty members reported that students had difficulty formulating a suitable research topic; specifically, they struggled to formulate a thesis statement/research question and to focus their topics. Students also struggled to identify the main keywords in their research topic. With respect to the “evaluating sources” worksheet, student performance was weakest on questions related to the scholarly practice of documenting sources and the intended audience and purpose/objective for an information source (e.g., inform, persuade, entertain, etc.).

How did you use findings for improvement?

During Fall 2011–Fall 2012 we conducted three workshops to share assessment findings, teaching tips, and instructional materials. We discussed the problems many students have with topic development and brainstormed ways to address this issue in class. Some instructors, in collaboration with ENGL 1120 instructors, are experimenting with different types of pre-writing activities to be completed by students in advance of the library session. With respect to evaluating sources, instructors have (1) redesigned worksheets to better focus on evaluating, rather than simply distinguishing, different types of information sources and (2) have replaced or supplemented written exercises with group presentations (the latter appear to do a better job of engaging students). Instructional materials are shared with library faculty via an online guide, which is maintained by a member of the library’s four-member
Instruction Team; library faculty members are encouraged to contribute to this guide.

Additional comments:

None