



Library Instruction and Themed Composition Courses: An Investigation of Factors that Impact Student Learning



Erin E. Rinto ^{a,*}, Elisa I. Cogbill-Seiders ^b

^a University of Nevada Las Vegas, 4505 S. Maryland Parkway, Box 457014, Las Vegas, NV 89154, USA

^b University of Nevada Las Vegas, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 2 October 2014

Accepted 25 November 2014

Available online 12 December 2014

Keywords:

Information literacy instruction

Value of libraries

English composition

First-year college students

ABSTRACT

Many academic libraries partner with English composition in order to teach first year students skills related to academic research and writing. Due to the partnership between information literacy and first-year writing programs, it is important to evaluate how these programs can best support one another. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of two factors on student information literacy skill development: library instruction and section theme—defined here as class sections of the English 102 (ENG 102) program developed around a central topic selected by the instructor. A random sample of annotated bibliographies from 95 sections of ENG 102 were scored with two information literacy rubrics in order to find out if scores differed between sections based on the variables of library instruction and theme. The results of this study indicate that sections of the ENG 102 program that attended an information literacy instruction session scored significantly higher on the annotated bibliography assignment than sections that did not attend. We also found that themed sections of ENG 102 scored marginally higher on the annotated bibliography than non-themed sections of ENG 102. Implications for further research are discussed, including the potential impact of theme-based writing on information literacy learning.

© 2014 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

On many college and university campuses, English composition holds the dual distinction of being both a gateway course for academic writing and research as well as a requirement for graduation. The high impact nature of these courses makes them a focus for many academic library instruction programs, and the information literacy literature is filled with case studies of collaborations between the library and English composition. Due to the natural partnership between information literacy and first-year writing programs, it is important to continue to evaluate how these programs work in tandem and can best support one another.

At the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, the library has developed a robust relationship with English 102 (ENG 102) and participates in ongoing assessment of the information literacy instruction component of the course. In ENG 102, the culminating assignment is an 8–10 page research paper; in preparation of this final assignment, students complete an annotated bibliography and research paper proposal. An evaluation of these annotated bibliographies and accompanying proposals has been the cornerstone of our assessment of first-year

students' information literacy skills in terms of identifying areas where students need more support. However, the authors realized that these bibliographies can also be used to shed light on how students best learn skills related to developing a research topic, finding quality sources, and evaluating information. We were especially interested in examining the impact of two factors on information literacy skill development: library instruction and section theme—defined here as class sections of the ENG 102 program developed around a central topic selected by the instructor.

The purpose of this study is to explore the variables of library session attendance and enrollment in a themed section of ENG 102 to see if either variable correlates with how well students scored on the annotated bibliography assignment. Our central research questions were “Do sections of ENG 102 that attend an information literacy instruction session at the library perform better on the annotated bibliography than sections without library instruction?” and “Do sections of ENG 102 that have a theme perform better on the annotated bibliography than non-themed sections?” The authors aim to contribute to the scholarship on the impact of library instruction as well as offer additional data on factors that can lead to improved information literacy learning. By examining variables related to both the library and the composition program, we hope to provide recommendations that enable librarians and their campus partners to maximize opportunities for student academic success.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 702 895 2103.
E-mail address: erin.rinto@unlv.edu (E.E. Rinto).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since this study examines two potential factors that influence student learning, theme-based course sections and library instruction, the literature review is comprised of two parts. The review of information literacy literature explores varying viewpoints regarding the efficacy of the single course period instruction, commonly called “one-shot” library instruction. The composition literature uncovers differing ideas on the benefits of theme-based composition courses, namely the importance of authenticity and self-direction in student learning. In both cases, it is clear that more exploration needs to be done on how these factors relate to student learning in the context of first-year, novice researchers.

INFORMATION LITERACY LITERATURE: IMPACT OF LIBRARY INSTRUCTION ON STUDENT LEARNING

A review of the literature shows that many instruction librarians are deeply invested in understanding the factors that correlate with student success, and many studies examine the impact of one-shot instruction on student learning. One pattern that emerges from the literature is a conflict regarding the efficacy of one-shot library instruction. Instruction librarians are still working to understand how to make the most of their time with students and which instruction program models are most beneficial to student learning.

There are a number of studies that give credence to the impact of the one-shot session on student learning. In many of these cases, researchers examined a student work product to see how the skills taught in the instruction session were developed in the context of a course assignment. *Hovde (2000)* and *Webster and Rielly (2003)* evaluated student research paper bibliographies to examine the types of sources selected and how students evaluated those sources. Both studies found that library instruction at least indirectly improved the quality of the bibliographies. Likewise, *Emmons and Martin (2002)* compared research papers from before and after a new inquiry-based instruction program took effect and found that one-shot sessions that focused on the process of inquiry led to an increased use of academic journal articles and library databases (*Emmons & Martin, 2002*).

It is also interesting to note that two studies that assessed the benefits of information literacy instruction, but did not directly examine student work, also found that one-shot library instruction had a positive impact on student learning. *Spievak and Hayes-Bohanan (2013)* asked students not currently enrolled in a course with a library instruction component to evaluate websites and search results and then complete a survey that asked about students' previous experiences with library instruction. Those students that had previously had a library instruction session made better judgments about the information and also were more efficient at completing the task. The authors suggest that this may point to information literacy as a “latent skill”—that learning is most apparent when “the environment is conducive and usefulness is self-sufficient” (*Spievak & Hayes-Bohanan, 2013, p. 495*). This notion is echoed in a study by *Saunders (2003)*, in which instruction was found to have a positive effect on reference services—students who had attended an information literacy instruction session were more likely to ask for reference assistance, which Saunders attributed to them becoming more sophisticated library users.

However, there is compelling evidence that one-shot instruction sessions simply are not conducive to deep, lasting student learning, though they may have other benefits, including increased feelings of confidence with using the library. *Ursin, Lindsay, and Johnson (2004)* conducted a citation analysis of final projects from a freshmen seminar course and found that while only 8% of the students used resources recommended by the librarian, students anecdotally reported feeling “more comfortable” with library research after the instruction session. *Portmann and Roush (2004)* used a pre- and post-test methodology to test their hypothesis that library instruction has a significant impact

on both the development of student research skills as well as increased student use of the library, but found that only use of the library increased as a result of instruction, not research skills.

Other studies have a decidedly more bleak outlook for one-shot library instruction; after comparing average course grades from students in sections of a course that had information literacy instruction to sections with no instruction, *Coulter, Clarke, and Scamman (2007)* found that there was “no clear benefit of information literacy instruction to students' performance” (p. 159). The authors point out that there are so many variables involved with the final grade assigned in a course, that “isolated visits cannot hope to overcome” all of them (*Coulter et al., 2007, p. 159*). Similarly, *Martin (2008)* investigated whether or not library instruction had any impact on the types of sources used by undergraduate education majors. It was found that scores were not statistically significantly related to attending a library session; with minimal association between library instruction and student use of quality academic sources, Martin argues that “it is time for librarians to seriously consider alternative practices” to one shot instruction (*Martin, 2008, p. 12*).

Martin's urge to consider alternatives to the one-shot is well-worth considering, and librarians have begun to examine the value of other instruction program models, including strategically placing information literacy instruction throughout different levels of the curriculum (*Bowles-Terry, 2012*), advocating for full-semester information literacy courses (*Cook, 2012; Wang, 2006*), increased collaboration between librarians and teaching faculty, including co-teaching (*Hearn, 2005*) and training-the-trainer (*Samson & Granath, 2004*), and programs that allow for multiple library sessions over the course of the semester (*Booth, Lowe, Tagge, & Stone, in press; Gilbert, 2009*). It is heartening to see the discussion expanding beyond one-shot instruction, but many instruction librarians are still only afforded a small amount of class time with students. It is therefore important to continue to develop our knowledge about best practices for these one-shot sessions, and to investigate elements that have impact on student learning.

COMPOSITION LITERATURE: IMPACT OF THEME-BASED COURSES ON STUDENT LEARNING

In an academic program as important and complex as composition, it is unsurprising that there are varying ideas on how best to go about the crucial task of teaching first year college students how to write. Some scholars and instructors discuss the basic function of composition programs as exposing students to and teaching them to write within various “genres”—that is, how to write for varying academic disciplines, audiences, purposes, and what different formats of writing, such as newsletters, memos, essays, poems, or reports, necessitate (*Bawarshi, 2003; Beaufort, 2012*). Even more specifically, *Lovitt and Young (1997)* describe the purpose of composition as teaching transactional writing—the writing students will use as professionals, citizens, and as they go about their daily lives. A basic tenet, therefore, of many composition programs is an emphasis on the *process* of writing, not the subjects about which students write.

This focus has shifted slightly with the introduction of cultural studies into some composition courses. *Fitts (2005)*, *Friedman (2013)*, and *George and Trimbur (1995)* all discuss the use of popular culture as a means to draw students in and increase engagement. This may take the form of popular culture materials appearing as readings in standard composition course texts, but these can still cover a wide array of subjects and may not be focused around a cogent theme. Some composition scholars are therefore engaged in an exploration of the benefits or detriments to pursuing such a themed course—a composition class centered around a subject selected by the composition instructor. Students may respond to texts, focus their class discussions, or develop their research topics around this theme.

Developing a themed course can have some problematic aspects. For example, researching materials for these classes is time consuming,

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/358194>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/358194>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)