# Student Engagement in One-Shot Library Instruction

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## ABSTRACT

As technology has increased students' access to both high and low quality information, the need for effective information literacy instruction has become more apparent. However, many librarians still struggle to solidify their place, and their value, in the instructional landscape of their parent institution. This struggle persists while library instruction for students remains limited to one 50–75 min session (one-shot instruction). Indeed, the notion that information literacy can be taught in one session is preposterous for most librarians. Nevertheless, as this constraint persists, librarians must work to improve the results students achieve within the one-shot model. This research explores ways in which one-shot library instruction might be bolstered through the promotion of higher levels of student engagement. This research utilizes a pre and post-test analytical model to compare an experimental, learner-centered approach to library instruction, supplemented with clickers, to a more traditional pedagogical approach. Statistical analyses show that while both the experimental and control groups witnessed significant improvement from pre to post-test, there was no statistically significant difference between these two approaches. These findings elicit further, perhaps more troubling, questions regarding the level of engagement possible in one-shot library instruction.

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## INTRODUCTION

For several decades now, librarians have pointed to the proliferation of information technology as both the answer to their information prayers and the bane of their instructional existence. Library users have access to a seemingly endless supply of digital information via the internet, which is great for academic research. However, as the maze of information grows the best path for any given academic need becomes more complex and equally less apparent. Users are no longer confined to their library's local collections. Traditional publishing companies are no longer the only entities publishing. This all further solidifies the user's need for an evaluative skill set that helps them to determine: (a) what information resources exist, (b) where these resources are located, and (c) which of these sources are authoritative and most relevant to their topic of research. At a glance, this seems simple enough, but still librarians struggle to reach their students — undergraduates especially.

Research has identified several factors that influence student success in the realm of higher education. Unfortunately for colleges and universities many of these factors exist outside their effective scope of influence. Of course, this fact does not let them off the hook in relation to

appeasing the requirements of accrediting agencies or the public at large who has grown increasingly more sensitive to the return on investment (ROI) and overall value of higher education. For these reasons it is important to identify and actively support those factors that buttress student success and exist within an institution's effective scope of influence. For Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2006) and Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2005), the key is *engagement.* The concept of engagement encompasses several organizational and environmental factors that have been linked to student success. Additionally, engagement is an element of the collegiate environment on which institutions can exert significant influence.

As is the case with their parent institutions, academic libraries are constantly under pressure to exhibit greater value to their users. One way in particular that libraries have chosen to exhibit such value is through library-based instructional efforts aimed at increasing both the visibility of library offerings as well as the information literacy of users (Kuh & Gonyea, 2003). This being the case, it makes sense for librarians to focus on engagement in ways similar to traditional teaching faculty (Kuh & Gonyea, 2003).

This research investigated the comparative impact of two separate instructional approaches on engagement and student success among students who received library instruction. The first approach took the form of a traditional, teaching-centered, lecture-based model. The second approach was a learner-centered approach fashioned using the research of the foremost scholars in the areas of student engagement and success. Classes of students enrolled in a required first-year writing course were randomly selected for exposure to one of the pedagogical

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approaches outlined above. Using a pre/post-test method of assessment, data pertaining to student success as defined by their mastery of important information literacy concepts, as well as student engagement and general library usage, were collected and compared across classes (at both the micro and macro levels). In the end, this research was geared toward answering the question of whether or not a clicker-augmented, learner-centered approach to one-shot library instruction is more effective than a more traditional lecture-based, teacher-centered approach.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Libraries are service organizations. Their service consists of, at the most foundational level, putting people in contact with information. The more effective they are in accomplishing this mission, the greater value they are able to show. Moreover, in this age of increased scrutiny and oversight, coupled with strained budgets, being able to show value is the key to organizational support and longevity.

With regard to the academic library, there are several perspectives one might employ when attempting to exhibit such value. One might point to collections, and more specifically the depth and breadth of said collections. *Do these collections support the university's missions of teaching, learning, and research?* One might also point to the access that a library provides to its collections. Further, tied in with access is both technology and service. The technology must be user-friendly, but there must also be a layer of user support that is provided by library personnel.

Over the past 20 years, the traditional approach to library service provision, which consisted mainly of point-of-need service, was expanded to include what has become known as *information literacy training, bibliographic instruction*, or simply *library instruction*. This introductory-level instruction is meant to augment the point-of-need services provided by libraries through basic training in resource usage and digital information retrieval and evaluation techniques (Massis, 2011). With this expansion of library service, librarians have yet another means of exhibiting library value to stakeholders, specifically with regard to their impact on student success (Massis, 2011).

## DEFINING STUDENT SUCCESS

The concept of *student success* is relatively simple at its core. Students attend schools, so their success is dependent upon their academic performance during that matriculation. Indeed, student success has often been linked to measures of individual academic achievement, as well as institutional achievement (Kuh et al., 2006). Standardized test scores, grade point average (GPA), and earned credit hours have become standard measures of student success at the individual level, while measures such as retention, persistence, graduation rates, and the number of degrees awarded over time have helped to define student success at the institutional level (Christenson, Reschly, & Wylie, 2012; Kuh et al., 2005, 2006; Mullin, 2012).

However, as the pressure on colleges and universities to show value has increased, so too has the complexity of measuring student success (Mullin, 2012). More than any single metric, research points to several personal, social, and environmental factors that shape student success (e.g., Habley, Bloom, & Robbins, 2012; Kuh et al., 2006). For example, research is expanding our understanding of how *pre-college experiences*, as well as the unique perspectives of social subgroups, affect students' educational experiences. The traditional, or what might be called average, student of the past is no longer the sole focus of most systems of education. In addition to the rudimentary student divisions, such as undergraduate, graduate, and distance learners, educators are now also concerned with low-achieving students, at-risk students, non-traditional (adult) students, and English as second language (ESL) students (just to name a few).

In light of these shifts in perspective, traditional measures of student success, such as GPA and graduation rates, have been expanded to highlight those skills that students should gain or improve through their studies, such as: "writing, speaking, critical thinking, scientific literacy, and quantitative skills and more highly developed levels of personal functioning represented by self-awareness, confidence, self-worth, social competence, and sense of purpose" (Kuh et al., 2006, p. 6). Of course, knowing the outcome of educational practices is meaningless without understanding how to influence such outcomes. Moreover, the factors that potentially influence student success seem innumerable. One must consider, for example, pedagogical approach (Hall, Wilson, & Sanger, 2012; Horspool & Lange, 2012); instructional support (Cho & Karp, 2013); campus culture (Brown & Burdsal, 2012); student advising (Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, & Hawthorne, 2013); and mentorship (Felder, 2010; Neuhauser & Weber, 2011). Couple this with the wide variety of student types previously mentioned and it becomes difficult to see the forest for the trees.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ENGAGEMENT

As previously mentioned, the work of Kuh et al. (2005, 2006) outlines a complex framework of student success within which must be recognized several personal and environmental elements that can potentially affect student success. In particular, their "What Matters to Student Success" framework depicts the journey toward student success not as a straight path, but as a complex maze of possible paths and obstacles. A student's *pre-college experiences*, at the micro level are tinged by culture, training, economics, or any number of other social, political, or institutional influences. These pre-college experiences lead into an environment divided, perhaps unevenly, between student behaviors and institutional conditions. As one might guess, *student behaviors* can refer to: study habits, peer involvement, interaction with faculty, time on task, motivation, or several alternative possibilities. At the same time, *institutional conditions* can include: first year experience, academic support, campus environment, peer support, pedagogical approaches, and numerous other factors.

At the nexus of student behaviors and institutional conditions one finds *engagement* (Kuh et al., 2006). The concept of *engagement* has gained considerable traction as a key factor affecting student success. Kuh et al. (2005 2006) have noted that it makes sense for institutions to focus on engagement, as it is often the only environmental element on which they can exert direct influence. That is to say, while universities rarely have an opportunity to exert direct influence on their students during the formative years leading up to enrollment, they do have opportunities to directly affect student success by facilitating more positive contact between students and the academic environment through engagement.

Over the past twenty years scholars have identified several institutional practices that lead to higher levels of student engagement and success (e.g., Astin, 1999; Chickering & Gamson, 1991; Chickering, Gamson, & American Association for Higher Education, W., DC., 1987; Kuh et al., 2005; Pace, 1984). In the preface to their volume, *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement*, Christenson et al. (2012) identified what they refer to as a "general consensus regarding a number of facets of engagement theory" (p. v). This consensus proclaims that *engagement* is not only about attendance, performance, or persistence in the academic setting, but also about something of a culture[2] that helps to define those academic settings in which students thrive intellectually. Citing several authors,[3] they surmised that: "Engagement is a

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[2] Whether these elements coalesce to form a unique "culture of learning" or an "organizational culture" that is more conducive to learning than others remains to be seen. However, the consensus among scholars cited herein points to such a phenomenon, whereby seemingly independent social and organizational elements come together in a way that allows for higher levels of student achievement.

[3] Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992.