

End of Semester Report

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ILS 582 – Library Science Practice

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Primary Project

When I began the library science practice at Naugatuck Valley Community College (NVCC), Ms. Hammond and I decided that the primary project for me to work on would be a learning outcomes assessment for NVCC's library instruction program. The emphasis for such assessment came from their current reaccreditation process with the New England Association for Schools and Colleges (NEASC), which expects the library to provide support for the information literacy training of the students.

The current library instruction program at NVCC does individual instruction sessions as requested by the teaching faculty. There is a simple web form (NVCC, 2011) that allows the faculty to easily provide the information the librarians at NVCC need to offer their instruction services. From my observations, many of these instruction sessions cover a basic level of library use and resources and are frequently focused on specific assignments supplied by the faculty members. There is little to no use of performance measurement tools to assess the effectiveness of the instruction program, either for the individual instruction sessions or for the entire student career at NVCC.

To begin the process of developing assessment tools for the library instruction program, we first decided to better formalize the program's mission so that there was a clear idea of the goals. There were several basic resources that were helpful in my process of developing the mission statement. The first were the mission statements for both NVCC and the library, since it would be important to tie the instruction program's mission statement to its parent organizations. In addition, I made use of resources provided by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) where there has been a lot of recent development in standardizing information literacy through the United States (ACRL, 2010; ACRL, 2001; ACRL 2000). I started off by soliciting information literacy mission statements from various colleges and universities, requesting submissions through various ALA-sponsored listservs (collib-l, uls-l, ili-l, and infolit-

l). Ms. Hammond also solicited responses via the community college listserv as well. After receiving a good number of mission statements from a wide variety of institutions, I examined them looking for similar themes, language used, and formatting styles. Drawing inspiration from my examination of other instructional programs and highlighting key points in the mission statements for NVCC and the library, I drafted three different versions of a mission statement with different styles and language. These versions, along with parts of my drafting process, were forwarded to the other reference librarians for feedback. There was a preference for a certain style from one statement and some of the language from another. I used this feedback to compose a new mission statement drawing elements from the preferred drafts. The following is the result:

The mission of the library instruction program is to promote information literacy to the community of Naugatuck Valley Community College; provide training and assistance in the use and evaluation of diverse information resources; cultivate a passion in students for lifelong learning and to fully develop their potential; and to collaborate with teaching faculty to further the greater missions of NVCC and the Max R. Traurig Library.

Once we had the mission statement in place and had a clearer idea of the focus for the library instruction program at NVCC, it was decided that we should determine what areas of the program should be assessed and develop objectives to aim for. After some research and consideration on my part, I determined that with the way the current library instruction program was structured there were actually two different areas that needed to be assessed: the effectiveness of the library instruction program over the entire time that a student is attending NVCC; and the effectiveness of the individual instruction sessions – macro and micro levels respectively.

On the macro-level, it was my recommendation that the library try to develop some sort of initial information literacy assessment early in the student careers at NVCC. The appropriate place for this to occur would likely be during the First Year Experience course that NVCC was offering to their incoming students. The purpose of this assessment would be to determine a baseline for the information literacy skills prior to any formal library instruction. The data from such an assessment would be useful in several different areas

- It would provide quantitative and qualitative data to demonstrate the need for effective information literacy training and therefore increase the perceived value of the library and its services.
- It would be a comparison dataset to a exiting assessment (hopefully) to help measure the effect of the library instruction program.

- It would define areas of strengths and weaknesses in the students' information literacy skills, which will allow the instructing librarians to better focus their lessons to meet the needs.

As mentioned in the above points, this incoming assessment would hopefully be paired with some form of outgoing assessment which would then provide datasets that encompass the time the students are at NVCC and can determine whether the library instruction program is serving its mission. The objectives drafted for this macro-level assessment were largely based on parts of NVCC's general education competencies, which include several sections related to information and technological literacy skills.

On the micro-level, there is an additional need to assess the information literacy training gained from the one-shot instruction sessions. This was a tougher area to develop objectives for due to the varying instructional needs of these sessions. Since many of the instruction sessions tend to be focused on specific assignments provided by the teaching faculty, the skills being taught are not fixed. Based on these considerations, I came to two possible solutions to how the librarians could assess their instruction sessions. The first is to develop a bank of objectives for the different skills they cover during the sessions. Depending on what skills are being focused on in that session, the librarians would use the appropriate objectives. The second solution is to develop a template set of objectives that could be customized for each session. After some discussion, it was decided that the first solution would probably be the easiest and most effective means. Since the teaching faculty is already choosing the skills they wish to have covered in the library instruction session in the web form, it would be easy to just use those selections to match with the appropriate objectives.

As my objective recommendations were then circulated among the librarians at NVCC, I began researching on the next step in the process. The NVCC library had acquired a classroom response system (CRS) or "clicker" system with the intent to use it during the library instruction systems. Therefore, the next task at hand was to research ways in which "clicker" systems have been used elsewhere, with an emphasis on more interesting and entertaining techniques. A thorough search through library science databases did not turn up beyond a few articles on how some libraries have implemented their "clicker" systems. I had more luck when I turned my attention to more general education publications, particularly science education. There I was able to find a collection of articles and guides to using CRSs for both instructional and assessment purposes. My final submission to the library was a summation of the suggestions and experiences learned from these articles as a resource to guide them to developing their own use in their program.

The future of this project will likely involve the actual creation of the assessment instruments and a period of trial and error as they get implemented into the library instruction program. Some more refinement may be necessary if NEASC decides to refine how they are

assessing information literacy into their accreditation standards. Overall, this project has provided valuable experience in researching for beyond just theoretical information, as would be customary for most academic written papers, and actually looking for the practical uses. I found when research articles, that I was digger deeper into their process, rather than paying attention to their conclusions or earlier research steps. This project also required me to examine and become familiar with various standards documentation, including ACRL, NEASC, and NVCC's own documentation. Familiarity with these areas is important if I wish to continue working in academic libraries and plan my own programs and initiatives. They provide guidelines for development as well as important arguments to use to support the reasons behind developing a program. Finally, I was able to experience the importance of communication within a project like this. I not only had to communicate and seek contacts outside of the institution to aid me in my own research, but also communication internally to make sure that everyone is able to work towards a consensus and understanding about how the project will work.

Other Activities:

Reference Duties:

I began the library science practice by shadowing Ms. Hammond at the reference desk to observe the operations of a reference librarian in a busy community college library. The observations included answering ready reference and technical support questions, as well as more in depth research questions on how to use the library's resources. Shortly after beginning the practicum, it was proposed to me that I could fill in on the desk for hours that needed to be covered. Since I arrived at the library early to avoid traffic problems, I was able to cover the 8-9 am period when they did not normally have a reference librarian scheduled. In this way, I was able to fully experience the desk duties at a time that was normally quieter during the day, and able to help provide greater coverage at the desk for the students. In addition to this set time each day, I also helped cover the desk at other times if the other librarians had other commitments or wanted to work on another of their myriad of projects. This worked out well, as it gave me experience throughout the morning (I was there from 8 am to 1 pm most days) and at times when the library was busier.

This experience at the reference desk was excellent because it gave me a direct opportunity to get a taste of what it would be like to be a reference librarian, or at least one part of it. At the start, I was nervous as well as felt a little overwhelmed wondering if I was providing adequate service to the people asking questions. As time went on, I became more comfortable for a couple of reasons. The first was that I grew more familiar with the resources that NVCC had to offer, so I did not have to scramble as much to find the correct resource. This familiarity was aided by observing several library instruction sessions, so I learned along with the students. The second reason was just an increase in confidence as the students and other librarians seemed to approve of how I was doing. I do know that there are still things I need to improve in this area.

My explanations, I felt, tend to be too complex and too rapidly delivered so I may have overwhelmed or added to the confusion of the questioner. I also feel I need to improve my skills with the reference interview in order to better understand the information need.

Library Instruction:

As I mentioned above, I was able to observe several library instruction sessions during the course of my practicum. This was incredibly helpful, since the last time I had actually seen such a lesson was when I was an undergraduate, and I do not think I paid much attention to it then (sorry Bowdoin librarians!). I was able to observe three different librarians and their varying styles at teaching. My experience during this internship went beyond just observation though, as I was given the opportunity to instruct my own session, one of the final for the year. Therefore I was able to prepare and deliver a library instruction session for one of the introductory communications classes. One particular highlight of the session was when I asked for a volunteered research topic to demonstrate using the databases, someone shouted out “Charlie Sheen”. So, that is what I worked with and it turned out pretty well as it offered a good opportunity to show various web sources for evaluation purposes as well. We all found out that Sheen holds a patent for a lip balm dispenser when we took a look at government documents.

Following the instruction session, I was given excellent feedback by the librarian who supervised me and was able to discuss areas that I did well as well as areas where I could improve. Overall this was a very fulfilling experience and again gives me valuable insight into the responsibilities and duties of the academic reference librarian.

Overall Impression:

I believe that the library science practice is going to be one of my most valuable experiences at library school. I found that while it was giving me firsthand experience towards being an academic reference and instruction librarian, it worked with a particular synergy with my other coursework (both past courses and the concurrent ones). This semester while doing the practicum, I also took College and University Libraries and Instructional Design Principles, and found that the course content there aided in my understanding of what I was doing at NVCC. For example, in the Instructional Design course, we spent a unit talking about performance assessments and objective creating, which I instantly saw applicable to what I was doing for the primary project. At the same time, my experiences at NVCC also enriched the content I was able to add to class discussions in my other classes. My time at NVCC not only gave me the chance to see library work is like up close, but also how the library interacts and connects with the rest of the college. One of Ms. Hammond’s great talents is her ability to reach out and connect with students, faculty, and administrators throughout NVCC, spreading awareness of the library’s resources and services and increasing its value in the eyes of the community. This is something that I would love to be able to do at some point in the future. As librarianship seeks a way to

thrive in a world that is increasingly moving online, outreach and relationship building are going to become important goals. I think that was one of the most valuable lessons I learned here. In the end, I feel that my library science practice not only was a valuable experience-builder for me, but has made me a better student as well will make me a better librarian in the future.

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