**Incorporating Library Instruction and Resources into the University’s Writing Program for Undergraduates**

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**Background**

The librarians of the Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library witnessed a number of trends in the past 8 years:

- Traditional focus on meeting the needs of on-site graduate and professional students expanded as on-site health sciences programs grew
- Undergraduate programs in clinical laboratory science, emergency health services, clinical leadership and management, and clinical research administration introduced via distance education platforms
- New user group emerged: individuals with some or all of their undergraduate training completed who wished to enter or advance a health professions career

The Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library initially struggled to meet the needs of these non-traditional students and eventually devised a number of programs and services to support the research and educational needs of these students including:

- Education of distance education faculty on copyright, off-campus access options, and online resources at the annual health sciences faculty retreat, through the library liaison program, and via the creation of online tutorials
- Reviewing of the Library’s web page to emphasize easy use of and access to online resources and highlighting the logistics of obtaining passwords, off-campus access, and on-campus contacts
- Inclusion of multi-disciplinary databases such as ACR/Inform Complete on the Library’s homepage to meet general education needs
- The extension of strictly health sciences resources to the main academic gateway to improve undergraduate exposure to these tools
- Responsibility for a 1-credit, online course, Foundations of Management Information Systems, which taught basic computer and information literacy skills (HSci106)

**University Writing Program**

To promote scholarship, critical thinking, and academic excellence among undergraduates, the University created a seven-credit, mandatory writing program for all students:

- Every freshman takes a 4-credit writing seminar focused on a theme, such as “Shakespeare and Love” or “Conspiracy Theory,” which includes three increasingly complex writing assignments
- During Sophomore and Junior years, students are required to take two 3-credit writing-intensive courses within their respective disciplines
- Departments providing extensive support to the program include the Writing Center and the Gelman Library, the University’s main undergraduate library

**The Issue of Distance Education Students in the Health Sciences**

Health Sciences distance education students posed a special problem as the University implemented its Writing Program:

- Each student enters the SMSHS distance education program with at least 60 credits completed, including 6 credits in English composition
- Should the University’s writing requirements apply to them or should the program be adapted in some way to reflect their advanced status?

The solution: Beginning fall 2007, students working toward a BS in Clinical Management and Health Sciences distance education students posed a special problem as the University implemented its University created a seven-credit, mandatory writing program for all students:

**Steps to Success**

Liberators initially groaned at the assignment and then moved quickly to seize the opportunity by:

- Identifying topics essential to successful student writing projects in the health sciences including:
  - Selected health sciences and general online resources
  - Steps in the online research process
  - Analytical skills for evaluating resources
  - Using research materials to support an argument
- Reviewing existing instructional content for repurposing online: Materials reviewed included:
  - On-campus orientations for new students
  - Specialized research skills classes for Nurse Practitioner students
  - Evidence-based medicine classes for residents
  - Informatics modules on evaluation and the web developed in Blackboard to support the HSci 106 course and Problem-Based Learning
  - Tutorials on searching MEDLINE

“Overall, this process was somewhat frustrating. As our reading in the provided links state, sometimes it is difficult to find exactly what I am looking for. I was quite pleased to learn we have access to many different tools in our library and can go to one place to search many databases. I often look at the internet as the easiest place to search, but it is not always the most accurate and for reliable science information I would not use this at all if possible…”

**Student Response and Instructor Feedback**

To say the least, we were overwhelmed with the student response to the assignment. Our impressions were as follows:

- Every student completed the assignment fully
- Based on the depth and range of responses, most students had clearly completed the tutorials and applied the principles taught
- No one was shy about providing peer feedback; comments and suggestions from students were voluminous! We had a hard time keeping up with the amount of student-provided responses
- Students, not surprisingly, were more comfortable navigating the web in general than in searching databases for peer-reviewed articles
- Most indicated that they had learned new skills and felt that the process had taught them how to research policy issues
- The instructors reviewed each response carefully and posted feedback online much as the student peer reviewers did. They also posted sample searches and answers online so that students could review suggested answers

**Future Plans**

The success of this module resulted in the following:

- Creation of a formal online tutorial using this content in Camtasia
- Planning meetings with the Instructional Technology Staff in the Health Sciences Programs to increase the presence of both the librarians themselves and the Library’s resources within the curriculum
- Exploration of additional tutorial topics for students and faculty
- Participation in live webinars for faculty on incorporating online resources into the curriculum

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**The End Result**

A module that emphasized the research process and highlighted health sciences and multidisciplinary online resources was adapted from existing instructional material and an original introduction and assignment created as follows:

- Searching for High Quality Information which covered such topics as selecting the best information resource, searching beyond the web, the professional health sciences literature, MEDLINE, and evaluating information
- Searching the Health Sciences Literature which covered selecting a research topic, steps in the research process, selecting the appropriate resource for your information need, and citing sources
- The Focused Assignment required students to research obesity in adolescents in order to practice:
  - Locating background information on a topic
  - Identifying high quality and factual materials on the Web such as statistics, program information, and position papers
  - Locating professional level materials through a database search
  - Locating news and policy-driven sources in an interdisciplinary database
  - Critiquing their own and colleagues search strategies and results
- Students could link directly to online books and journals and to additional tutorials from the appropriate sections of the tutorials. Full contact information for Library support was provided. All assignments were uploaded to Blackboard for peer review

**The Overall Search Process was an eye opening one. After having written hundreds of college papers the last several years I felt like I knew a fair amount about research. I realized however that I have many more resources available through the GW library sources than I would have otherwise. The e-texts are a nice addition with readily available summaries.”**