

QUEST: A Collaborative Approach to Information Literacy

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Abstract

QUEST, a joint venture of Villanova University's Falvey Memorial Library and the Core Humanities Seminar (CHS) faculty, began as a one semester self-paced online tutorial to introduce freshmen to the basic concepts of information literacy. Since Core Humanities is required for all incoming freshmen and is a cornerstone of the Core Curriculum at Villanova, it was felt that a foundation for information literacy initiatives should start here. Through these entities on campus, an Information Literacy Committee was formed and tutorial exercises were customized to course syllabi for 1,600 freshmen in over 100 sections. Librarians introduced the tutorials in a classroom setting and then corrected them as they were received via e-mail. Feedback was provided to the professors and students. Second semester included hands-on library instruction sessions on Boolean logic and critical resource evaluation techniques. This further encouraged the collaborative process with faculty at the same time it increased awareness of the librarian's role in the education process. Middle States guidelines for a broader institution-wide information literacy component were also addressed. Reference and non-reference librarians, CHS faculty, CHS staff, Media Graphics, and Systems personnel were integral parts of the project's success.

Introduction

It has become apparent to most educators and academic librarians that instruction in library and information literacy is essential if students are to learn to be mature and self-directed learners. To achieve this end at Villanova University, an Information Literacy Commit-

tee was formed by the Library Director, Dr. James Mullins, and charged with developing an information literacy program. The program's goal was to bring to the students a sense of order and organization when dealing with the overwhelming explosion of print and electronic information.

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The Committee volunteers consisted of three Reference librarians, the Head of Public Services, the Head of Access Services, the Head of Periodicals, and the serials cataloguer.¹ Our objective was to reduce library anxiety by introducing basic information literacy skills during the first semester via a self-paced tutorial on the Web and then, second semester, build on these skills by teaching more sophisticated search techniques of specialized resources using a hands-on approach in the library. Included in this second semester presentation would be how to critically evaluate resources for accuracy, validity, bias and relevancy. The Committee anticipated that such a program would also satisfy the Middle States guideline to evaluate “the extent to which bibliographical instruction supports a broader institution-wide emphasis on information literacy.”²

The Committee considered integrating its proposals into the Core Humanities Seminar Program (CHS for short) on campus. This Core Curriculum Program, required for all incoming freshmen, is an interdisciplinary approach that encourages reflective examination of the primary texts and sources in Ancient, Medieval and Renaissance thought through to the Present. A year before, the Chair of the Core Program, Dr. John Doody, had agreed to integrate a relatively simple PowerPoint orientation to the library into their curriculum. Though this effort met with limited success, both the Chair and many of his staff supported attempting a tutorial-based information literacy effort. To ensure the success of this massive undertaking, garnering broad faculty support would be essential. Ultimately, several faculty agreed to serve on the Committee as liaisons for the Core Humanities Department and became deeply involved in all aspects of the planning and implementation process.

Efforts to Develop the Tutorial

For the Committee, the first priority was developing a project time line to implement the tutorial. Several underlying principles were generally agreed to late in 1997. Freshmen library orientation tours would no longer be offered before the semester began and CHS and the library would commit to orientating students to the library and library research skills through a joint initiative. The Information Literacy Program would not formally teach mechanical computer skills, such as using the mouse. Those tasks would be left to the computing services department on campus.

The elements composing the tutorial would address a list of library information seeking competencies developed over the years in the Reference Department, supplemented by input from CHS Committee faculty and from concepts presented in *The Brief Holt Handbook*³ (recommended for all freshmen). How to prioritize and coherently present these elements were issues wrestled with over the next several months by the Committee.

Initially, fourteen tutorials were reviewed by the Committee. Review criteria included content, hardware/software requirements, graphics presentation, logical organization, and interactivity. Tutorials were suggested through personal experience, the Library Instruction Round Table Tutorials General Guides to Research⁴, Villanova’s list of peer institutions, and other literature sources citing criteria for web-based tutorials.⁵

Committee members then prepared a list of comparable institutions to contact about their information literacy programs. Form questions were developed to help evaluate how these programs were incorporated within the overall campus and freshman orientation experience.

Ultimately, it was agreed to seek permission from the University of Dayton’s Roesch Library to adapt their elegantly direct and concise tutorial for this exciting initiative christened QUEST. It was determined that after the first semester tutorial, freshman should know some of the physical layout of the library (such as the Reference and Main Stacks sections), how to access the library homepage, how to use the local catalog (VUCat), and how to do basic citation searching in online databases and web sites.

The tutorial was evolving into an online lesson that could be completed from dorm rooms or elsewhere on campus. CHS faculty were then encouraged to submit topics to the Committee related to their syllabi which would form a core list of subjects from which students could choose in completing the tutorial exercises. However, as faculty had requested, one section required the students to physically come into the library and search a specialized print encyclopedia for several short answers.

The tutorial instructed the students to use one topic from the faculty-supplied list, such as Jane Austin, Islam, or St. Augustine, in completing all facets of the tutorial in the library’s catalog, the specialized encyclopedias, such as *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, selected databases, such as Humanities Index and Ex-

panded Academic Index, and pre-determined web sites. Optional links were embedded to explain to students such research issues as scholarly vs. popular materials, LC classification, the correct citation of sources, and Interlibrary Loan. Tutorials would be submitted to the librarians for correction via e-mail. Professors had an option of grading the tutorial, giving credit for it, or providing additional follow-up assignments. QUEST was launched after the above plans received the necessary faculty approval.

Introducing QUEST to Participants

At various stages in the program, public relations efforts were employed to inform the campus of this joint venture. The January 1998 Library newsletter, distributed campus-wide, carried positive comments by selected faculty describing their successes with library instruction. By April 1998, a prototype version of QUEST was being tested in one of the CHS classes. At this time, the library also invited all Core Humanities faculty to an Open House for a demonstration of the tutorial and to elicit feedback, thus furthering the collaborative process.

Later in the spring, it was determined that the librarians, rather than the CHS faculty, would introduce the freshmen to QUEST by way of a five-to-ten minute classroom presentation. This was a daunting endeavor to schedule, as there were over 100 classes and a total of 1600 freshman to reach. The presentation would include the various elements of the tutorial, how to access it from either the Library or Core Humanities homepage, and a description of the goals of the QUEST project.

At this juncture, most of the librarians were familiar with the idea of QUEST but unaware of its potential impact on their work routine. Some librarians were apprehensive about the prospect of visiting classrooms in the fall and briefly introducing QUEST to the students. They were also concerned about the perceived time necessary to correct the tutorials and provide feedback to the professors. In an attempt to ease these concerns, it was decided to contact the Chair of the Communication Department, Dr. Teresa Nance, and her colleague, Dr. Heidi Rose, to address the librarians on the fundamentals of classroom presentation and communication. Their workshop included various exercises and video feedback sessions and was well-received by most of the staff.

Early in the Fall semester, each librarian was supplied with the name and class schedule of two to three

Core Humanities professors with whom they would work all semester to introduce freshmen to QUEST. Preferences were given to matching library liaisons with their academic departments since Core professors often taught in other departments, such as History or Philosophy. The librarian was responsible for contacting each professor and arranging a preliminary office visit to further explain QUEST and what was intended to be accomplished. A date was then determined for the librarian to visit the classroom and briefly introduce the students to the online tutorial.

The Chair of CHS encouraged faculty to integrate the tutorial into their lesson plans. The class presentations were staggered over a three-month period so the librarians would not receive all completed tutorials at the same time and so student use of the specialized encyclopedias could be spread over the course of the semester. E-mail connections were established so when students entered the name of their professor, the completed tutorials were sent directly to the corresponding librarian's e-mail address for correction. Corrected tutorials were then returned to the professors for distribution to their students. In selected classes, a pre-test and post-test was administered by the librarian to measure whether anything was learned by completing the tutorial. QUEST was now well underway, and by having the librarians establish these contacts with the faculty, relationships developed, collaborative efforts increased, and the librarian's role in the learning process of the students and faculty expanded.

Public relations efforts continued as displays of QUEST-related material were prepared for the library lobby. Articles were placed in the student newspaper, *The Villanovan*, and in the faculty/staff newspaper, *Blueprints*. Informal brown bag lunches and planning meetings with Committee members and faculty continued to be held during the fall 1998 semester to maintain a high level of communication, especially as preparations for the second semester part of the program, QUEST STRATEGIES, was being developed. In the fall of 1998, evaluation forms from the Chair of Core Humanities were also distributed to the faculty to obtain additional feedback.

Efforts to Develop Second Semester QUEST Strategies

By August 1998, work had begun on the initial development of the information literacy program for the second

semester, christened QUEST STRATEGIES. Emphasis was placed on teaching the more sophisticated Boolean search techniques used in retrieving material from VUCat and selected databases and on discussing criteria for evaluating the appropriateness of those resources.

A fifty-minute PowerPoint presentation was developed to coincide with the University's *Worlds in Collision* theme and with Villanova's Irish connections. "England and Ireland in Conflict: An Interdisciplinary Investigation of the Rebellion of 1798" was selected as an example of this broad theme. To create an Irish mood, slides and music of Ireland were incorporated into the presentation.

Students were then taught to extract concepts from a narrower, more focused topic, form a Boolean search statement and execute it in one of three different databases (Historical Abstracts, MLA Bibliography, and the library's online catalog). Students were also given two pre-selected web sites to evaluate based on a set of detailed criteria.

Committee and Staff Efforts Second Semester

As the technical preparations for QUEST STRATEGIES progressed, it was apparent that some of the non-reference librarians had reservations about leading sessions. They were being asked to teach freshmen classes material unfamiliar to them and to use multimedia equipment with which they were not comfortable. To try to alleviate these concerns, the Committee decided to pair a Reference librarian with a non-Reference librarian for each session. It was also decided to invite Carol Weiss, Ph.D. from the Villanova Institute for Teaching and Learning (VITAL), to address the librarians about teaching college students. Dr. Weiss detailed the levels of intellectual development in college students and gave insight on how best to approach them in a teaching situation. In a second visit, she critiqued the QUEST STRATEGIES presentation and answered additional questions. Her visit was another example of the collaborative efforts underscoring the program.

To further reduce any remaining librarian anxiety, the Committee prepared a script that closely followed the PowerPoint presentation. Librarians could follow or adapt the script as they chose. The presentation was loaded on the library server so staff could practice it in private.

Efforts to Launch QUEST Strategies

At the start of the 1999 spring semester, the Chair of Core Humanities sent memos to his faculty reiterating

what QUEST STRATEGIES hoped to achieve and requesting them to schedule their classes for the advanced research instruction in the library.

Sessions were then adjusted around the other instruction classes normally held during the spring semester. The Committee planned the QUEST STRATEGIES sessions to run from January through April in hopes of encouraging professors to integrate skills taught at the presentations into their class curriculum.

At the same time, to further publicize QUEST STRATEGIES, a significant library display was mounted from the Irish material in the Library's Special Collections. During this time, faculty were also encouraged to provide the librarian with any research assignments for that semester so they could be integrated into the QUEST STRATEGIES presentation.

Conclusion

This type of collaborative effort may not be new, but it is also not the norm in most academic institutions. It is hoped that under the proper circumstances and direction, this can become more prevalent on campuses. Although drawbacks exist, many more benefits accrued. For the faculty, this partnership with the library provided another dimension to their teaching of information literacy and was an opportunity to upgrade their own skills.

For the librarians, this was another opportunity to promote team-building within the library and encouraged collaboration with the faculty. It provided a way to familiarize themselves with various disciplines, departments, and programs. On a more personal level, it increased self-confidence and fostered a new sense of accomplishment.

For the students, the pro-active approach of QUEST and QUEST STRATEGIES re-enforced the concepts of self-sufficiency while laying the foundations for building information literacy skills. These skills will be further enhanced as the Information Literacy Programs expand to incorporate higher-level research in upper-level classes.

For the University, this project attempted to address the Middle States Information Literacy guidelines and added another component to the University's Learning Communities theme. It also increased awareness of the importance of collaboration between the various teaching elements on campus.

As for the QUEST tutorial itself, an analysis of

Test Conducted	Test Results	Significant at
T Test	.0004	>.05
Analysis of Variance	.0178	>.05
Chi-Square	65.179	<3.84

pre- and post-test data, collected from six different class sections, containing one hundred students, produced extraordinary results. As the figures indicate, the improvement rate from the pre-test to the post-test, after taking the tutorial, was dramatic, clearly demonstrating the value of the tutorial process.

As for QUEST STRATEGIES, the quality of future individual class assignments will be an indicator of how successfully the presentations conveyed searching and evaluating techniques.

Notes

1. The Information Literacy Committee is composed of the following librarians: Judith Olsen, Chair;

David Burke; Michael Foight; Louise Green; Susan Markley; Barbara Quintiliano, and Merrill Stein. The following faculty represented Core Humanities: Professors John Doody, Chair of CHS; Earl Bader; Peter Glomset; Marylu Hill; Gaile Pohlhaus and Lauren Shohet.

2. Commission on Higher Education, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools. *Guidelines for Librarian Evaluators*. Philadelphia: 1997

3. Kirszner, Laurie G., *The Brief Holt Handbook*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998.

4. Library Instruction Round Table. *Library Instruction Tutorials; General Guides to Research*. LIRT. 29 December 1998. <<http://diogenes.baylor.edu/Library/LIRT/lirtgen.html>>.

5. "Special Issue: The Best of Library-Related Web Sites." *Library Hi Tech* 15 (1997). 3-4.

6. We are indebted to Dr. Joseph Pigeon, Department of Mathematical Sciences, Villanova University for his work on the statistical analysis of the QUEST tutorial.