

Assessing Information Literacy Competency in Students Enrolled in Degree Programs

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One of Seneca Libraries' core services is information literacy instruction. Information literacy (IL) can be delivered in different formats – Seneca Libraries offers face-to-face classes, online interactive tutorials, videos, as well as one-to-one research appointments. All of the instruction is guided by the standards and learning outcomes of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). Because IL is a priority for the library, we set out to determine what impact IL instruction was having on Seneca students.

Background

Seneca Libraries began scaffolding IL activities into the degree curriculum in 2010. This meant that librarians would partner with faculty teaching in degree programs and administrators to examine the curriculum and select appropriate classes for IL instruction and determine how to scaffold the learning over the four years. Appropriate IL interventions would then be developed and delivered to the students enrolled in degree programs in the selected (usually research-intensive) classes.

Seneca Libraries set out to evaluate the success of this program by developing an assessment instrument to deliver to the incoming Bachelor of Commerce (B. Comm) students in Fall 2013. The goal of the assessment study was to measure the IL skill development in the B. Comm graduating class of Winter/Spring 2017 as an indicator of the IL competencies gained in the degree programs at Seneca.

Study Design

With the approval of Seneca's Research Ethics Board and support of the Seneca Business, librarians delivered the pre-test to new B. Comm students at the beginning of the first semester in 2013 (n=184). The same cohort was tested in their last semester in Winter/Spring 2017 (n=48). During the four-year time span, the Bachelor of Commerce students at Seneca should have had the following IL interventions: three face-to-face classes with a librarian and three online tutorials distributed in the 1st, 2nd, and 7th semesters.

Overview of Results

The results show an overall increase of 4.8% of the mean scores from 2013 to 2017. Results also show that students who reported completing the tutorials had up to 10% higher mean score than students who did not complete any library tutorials. Mean scores were also 10% higher for students who attended two or more IL sessions than for students who attended only one session.

Discussion

This study shows that students enrolled in degree programs are making notable gains in their IL skills in their four-year program and that the Libraries' interventions are linked to higher scores. The results also suggest that areas of strength include database-searching skills, knowledge of copyright, and academic honesty. One area that was identified for improvement is around students' ability to evaluate information critically. This has been targeted as an area for growth for the Libraries' online tutorial offerings.

Designing this assessment has been a great opportunity to reflect on our practices and see where our strengths lie and what could be improved. The results also reinforce the importance of partnering with program faculty and strategic scaffolding of library instruction across degree programs.

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