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ABSTRACT

Because students often produce writing that incorporates few or no outside sources of information, or is incorrectly documented, library skill instruction should be a part of the basic curriculum in college. Students need this instruction most at the beginning of their higher educational career, for these skills will be necessary throughout and beyond their college education. Although many basic course textbooks offer little or no assistance to the student reader trying to do research in an academic library, many libraries have orientation programs suitable for students in basic courses. For example, students at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst are provided with practice in library usage by an instructing team that includes both faculty members and library personnel. Orientation begins with an introduction to the building and its services. Instruction includes a brief description of the Library of Congress classification scheme, and exercises using the "Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature," "Social Sciences Index," the card catalog, and encyclopedias. Students also write annotated bibliographies. This library instruction has proven valuable to many of the students, who become more confident of their ability to find and use information in the library. (SRT)

INTEGRATING LIBRARY RESEARCH SKILLS INTO THE BASIC COURSE CURRICULUM

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I. The Need for Library Literacy

Being able to function in a library is something most of us take for granted. Ideally, our students, too, should be able to shape pertinent materials into coherent speeches and papers. Libraries are at our students' disposal. Yet, we are too familiar with students who turn in work that incorporates few or no outside sources of information, work that includes irrelevant citations, work that is not original, work that is incorrectly documented, and work that is not documented at all. Our students, it seems, are not always able to function in a library. We, basic course teachers, cannot take this lack of library literacy for granted.

There are several reasons why students may not effectively use libraries. First, in our experience at a large public university with a library collection of more than 2 million items, we have seen students overwhelmed just by the size of the collection.

Even more problematic than the collection size to many students, though, are their rudimentary notions of how to seek out information. Some students come to college from a high school or junior college with a well-equipped library and a carefully developed library instruction program. These students constitute a fortunate minority. Other students come from educational backgrounds which feature less extensive library skills training. In a 1979 study of high schools, Joyce Merriam found that

> [i]n the typical library instruction program, one class period would often be devoted to library orientation and related activities. A second class period would be devoted to basic instruction in the use of two of the school library's major access tools, the card catalog and Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature. In [only] a few schools, three or more class periods would be set aside for these purposes. . . .[1]

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1. Most of the schools Merriam studied were feeder schools for a state university. Joyce A. Merriam, "Helping Students Make the Transition: A Study," Ed. Carolyn A. Kirkendall, Teaching Library

Not surprisingly, many students come to college lacking sufficient library skills training. When confronted with a much larger library collection and a much wider variety of materials than found in their high school or junior college libraries, these students have great difficulty completing assignments which require library use.

Finding a source cited in one of their textbooks may take them much longer than they expect and may be a frustrating experience. Finding a source not cited at all is even more frustrating. Students may understand that there exist valuable sources of thesis support such as: statistics, opinion poll results, newspaper editorials, comments in popular magazines, scholarly analyses, government reports, and so on, but may only have hazy notions of how to go about finding them. Some of these students may ask librarians or teachers for aid, but many, unfortunately, will opt not to complete tasks involving library research.[2]

Alternatively, those students who try to function independently under such circumstances may fall back upon library search procedures learned in high school or junior college; consulting an encyclopaedia or two, checking the card catalog, and looking up topics in the Readers' Guide. Consequently,

> [m]uch student library research is hit or miss. If [one] start[s] by looking in a card catalog for books or by browsing at random in the stacks, the research that results is almost inevitably incomplete and insufficient for a good paper. If the sources [found] are not related to one another, the problem of organizing [the] material becomes enormous. In addition, students often tend to be too content oriented in their library searches; they concentrate on

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Use Competence (Ann Arbor: Pierian Press, 1982) 4.

2. "[P]rocrastination is most likely when actors know what they are to do in the sense of having criteria to tell if they have done it, but don't know what to do in that they lack a recipe to follow." John Sabini and Maury Silver, Moralities of Everyday Life (New York: Oxford UP, 1982) 140.

> finding information on the topic and pay little attention to the quality or quantity of sources they use.[3]

We basic course teachers cannot assume that students have a working knowledge of the library, or that they have used an academic library independent (i.e. for other than reserve reading or as a place to study or to socialize) any more than we can assume that these same students know how to organize or deliver a speech without receiving guided instruction. We need to integrate library instruction into the basic course curriculum.

II. Library Literacy as Part of the Basic Course

Students' library literacy should be the responsibility of basic course instructors for several reasons. First, this instruction dovetails nicely into the basic course curriculum. Second, it is essential for students to receive this instruction early in their educational careers. Third, it is important that all students improve their research skills.

To begin with, library instruction fits well into the basic course curriculum because speakers or writers in the basic course "usually have sufficient experience upon which to draw for the accomplishment of their purpose, but they have not yet learned to select material and to introduce, organize, develop and conclude it."[4] Students in the basic course are ready to learn library skills and can mesh these skills with ones they are in the process of learning.

Second, students need to learn library skills at the beginning of their educational career. These skills prove useful throughout their schooling and beyond. Since the basic course is

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3. Elaine P. Maimon et al., Writing in the Arts and Sciences (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Winthrop, 1981) 71.

4. Harriett R. Idol, "The Objectives of Fundamental Speech Courses," Southern Speech Communication Journal 9(1943): 15.

often the first or only opportunity for students to acquire certain skills,[5] it is a good vehicle for teaching library literacy.

Third, we want all of our students to have fundamental skills. Library literacy needs to be made a curriculum component in a course all student take, such as the basic communication course.

There are good reasons for including library literacy in the basic course curriculum. Nevertheless, we may agree with these reasons, but be reluctant to implement a change. We can see that library literacy or even a discussion of library usage is rarely, if ever, mentioned in the basic course. It is certainly not listed by James W. Gibson and his colleagues, in "The Basic Speech Course at U.S. Colleges and Universities: IV," as among the "Ten Topics Receiving [the] Greatest Amount of [Instructors'] Time,"[6] nor is it a prominent topic in our basic course texts. Think of how limited and cryptic the explanations of library use are in basic course texts. For example, one popular speech text claims that "[t]hrough the careful use of the library--and with the help of reference librarians--you can discover an almost overwhelming amount of materials relevant to your speech subject and purpose."[7] In another popular, but combined skills, text, the difficulty of using the library is conceded by the authors, but little is offered, other than this acknowledgment, on library instruction. They state;

> [m]uch of the information and ideas you will want to use in speeches and essays can be found in written

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5. Don M. Boileau, "Development and Directions for the Basic Course: ERIC Report," Communication Education 34(1985): 74.

6. James W. Gibson, Michael S. Hanna, and Bill M. Huddleston, "The Basic Speech Course at U.S. Colleges and Universities: IV," Communication Education 34(1985): 287.

7. Douglas Ehninger, Bruce E. Gronbeck, Ray E. McKerrow, and Alan H. Monroe, Principles and Types of Speech Communication, 9th ed. (Oakland, New Jersey: Scott, Foresman, 1982) 132.

> sources. . . . The library is the place to go for these, but to locate a source in a library can sometimes be difficult.[8]

Writing texts do not provide much better fare than their speech or combined skills counterparts. Although most writing skills texts spend some pages on documentation, few explain in great detail how to use a library effectively. For example, in one text's chapter on writing the research paper, the following "helpful" advice is offered;

> [i]f you are interested in Jefferson, but know little about him, you might first go to an article on him in either the Encyclopaedia Britannica or the Dictionary of American Biography. . . .
>
> The best approach now is probably to go to the card catalog or to the shelves where the books on Jefferson are kept.[9]

Of course, some texts are more helpful than others for teaching library usage. There are texts that devote entire chapters to using the library,[10] but even these chapters are of limited utility unless accompanied by practice. Basic course teachers need to include practice in, as well as theory on, library literacy in the basic course curriculum. As Donald K. Darnell says in "Some 'Basics' to Get Back To,"

> [p]eople learn from experience, but there is a significant difference between experience as something that happens to a person and experience as the individual's interpretation of events in which the individual participates.[11]

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8. These authors provide a page and a half description on "Finding and Documenting Materials." Richard A. Katula, Celeste A. Martin, and Robert A. Schwegler, Writing and Speaking (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983) 381-382.

9. Diana Hacker and Betty Renshaw, A Practical Guide for Writers (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Winthrop, 1979) 199.

10. James M. McCrimmon, "Using the Library," Writing with a Purpose, 7th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980) 307-328.

11. Donald K. Darnell, "Some 'Basics' to Get Back To: A Transactional Perspective on Teaching-Learning," Communication

III. One Example of Library Literacy Instruction In the Basic Course Curriculum

To provide our students with practice in library usage we have on several occasions worked as a faculty/librarian team. We encourage you to do the same. We suggest that you discuss with a librarian the integration of library literacy skills into your basic course. Find out about your library's resources. It is likely to have an orientation program to provide an introduction to the physical layout of the collection, its staff, and its main service points. Your library may have a program of course-oriented library instruction, and librarians prepared to plan a session tailored to your students' specific needs, too.

In one of our most recent joint ventures, for instance, the librarian and the instructor developed one such library session for an intensive wintersession public speaking course.[12] The twenty-five students in this section ranged from second semester freshmen to final semester seniors. Only four or five of the students had already participated in a library literacy session. Perhaps only one or two of the students were regular library users.

We arranged to meet in a library classroom. The time available, one fifty minute class period, imposed one set of constraints on our possible instructional strategies. Learning objectives imposed another.[13] Since only a few of the students

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Education 27(1978): 273.

12. This account of our plan and its execution is neither singular nor inclusive, but is meant to serve as an example of how the teaching of library literacy might take place.

13. The overall objectives of the course were seen as: developing skills necessary for public communication, developing skills necessary for self expression, and building a basis for understanding the traditional values of human culture, as articulated by Otis M. Walter and Robert L. Scott, Thinking and Speaking: A Guide to Intelligent Oral Communication, 5th ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1984) 12-13.

had used the library before, our orientation was to include an introduction to the building and services. Students needed to know: where to find the card catalog and how it is arranged, where current, unbound issues of magazines and scholarly journals could be found, the shelving arrangements of back issues of periodicals, the layout of two library buildings, and the role of the reference librarian, as differentiated from other library staff.

Our actual instruction began with a brief description of the Library of Congress classification scheme. The special terminology used in the subject section of the card catalog was explained and compared with the terminology used in periodical and newspaper indices. Next, students were "talked through" a practical exercise which required them to use the Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature, the Social Sciences Index, and the Humanities Index, as well as the card catalog, and encyclopedias.[14] Students also learned how to construct an annotated bibliography, which was to be the basis for another library assignment.[15] We assured the class that if they were able to gather the information they needed for this bibliographic assignment, they would have little trouble doing the same for future bibliographies.

The exercises were evaluated, returned to the students, and discussed with them. The practical exercise seemed to pose few

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14. Students were asked to find, to compare and to contrast data and data sources. Otis M. Walter and Robert L. Scott, Thinking and Speaking: A Guide to Intelligent Oral Communication, 35-34.

15. For this assignment, students were to prepare annotated bibliographies on preassigned topics on speech communication. Their bibliographies were to be used as jumping off points for a series of informative speeches. Students were encouraged to consult Communication Abstracts since some of their topics were as specialized as "accuracy and language," or "the use of demographics in speech preparation." Communication Abstracts is a publication that would have otherwise remained unfamiliar to most of the students.

problems, but the annotated bibliography, which required students to branch out beyond standard resources, troubled some of them.

As the term progressed, we found that students who had put considerable effort into creating that first annotated bibliography were able to create sound bibliographies for additional assignments. Students who had not put much effort into the first assignment had difficulty with later ones.

We considered the class time allotted to library instruction to be well spent. Students who had not experienced this kind of instruction before became more confident of their ability to use the library. Those who had participated in similar sessions for other classes found the additional guidance helpful and were able to link their earlier knowledge of library usage to a wider range of material. These findings are not surprising. For librarians and basic course teachers, library instruction may seem "like climbing in that its justification lies in its challenge, in this case the challenge of making others aware of the full range of information resources", [16] but, it is also like succeeding in scaling the peak. Once one commands the mountain, or the skills, one also commands the view. We enable our basic course students to seek new heights when we set them on the path to library literacy.

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16. Anne K. Beaubien, Sharon A. Hogan, and Mary W. George, Learning the Library (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1982) 1.

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