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Teaching Strategies to Seal the Deal: Teaching Information Literacy Online

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Teaching Strategies to Seal the Deal: Teaching Information Literacy Online

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‘Knowing how to navigate through the information fog isn’t something you can pick up easily on your own. Truth to tell, there is a ton of studies telling us that most people have vastly higher opinions about their research ability than actual tests of that ability can demonstrate’ (Badke 2017, p. xviii).

Over the last two decades, information literacy has evolved from an academic afterthought to a definitive discipline. Prior to the Internet, most students, professors, and faculty librarians assumed that students automatically became “information literate” just by doing research assignments. However, amid the digital age, both information and misinformation have become prolific. The ability to discern and evaluate types of information is essential and is something students do not just pick up by doing research assignments.

As professors and faculty librarians teaching a dedicated information literacy course in higher education, we strive to bring about the realization among students and faculty that information literacy is relevant to every discipline. Fostering a positive learning environment in an online classroom by using effective teaching strategies and cultivating engaging content facilitates that realization. Students learn the information skills they need to succeed in the classroom and in life.

Having taught information literacy as a general education requirement for fifteen years, we realize the need to update the course continually to keep it relevant and engaging. In the process, we have learned what works to grab students’ attention and what doesn’t. Most often, assignments and activities need to engross the student on a personal level. The activities and assignments described below engage students in learning and are among their favorites.

A Visit to the Library of Congress - Virtually



Carla Hayden, Librarian of Congress and Peggy Ridlen, Instruction Librarian Fontbonne University
ALA Annual Conference, Chicago, Illinois, 2017

The Library of Congress is the United States' oldest federal cultural institution and serves as the research arm of the United States Congress. It is also the largest library in the world, with more than 155.3 million items on approximately 838 miles of bookshelves. The collections include more than 35 million books and other print materials, 3.4 million recordings, 13.6 million photographs, 5.4 million maps, 6.5 million pieces of sheet music, and 68 million manuscripts (Library of Congress, n.d.).

The Library began in 1880 inside the U.S. Capitol and now occupies three buildings in Washington, D.C. on Capitol Hill. The Thomas Jefferson Building

(1879) is the original Library of Congress building. The John Adams building was added in 1938, and the James Madison Memorial Building in 1981.

In addition to the numerous displays a visitor to the Library of Congress will see, major Library exhibitions are also available online, as are numerous prints and photographs, historic films, political speeches and more. The Library of Congress Online Catalog (<https://catalog2.loc.gov/>) can be searched by keyword or browsed by authors/creators, subjects, names/titles, uniform titles, or call numbers. Browse lists also include searching aids such as cross-references and scope notes. (Library of Congress, n.d.) Many of these resources can also be accessed through the Library of Congress app (<https://www.loc.gov/apps/>).

Given the richness of these collections, we thought it important for students to be aware of this resource and understand its importance in our history and culture. With that in mind, we developed the following assignment.

Assignment: Virtual Visit to the Library of Congress

Learning Outcomes:

- a) *Demonstrate the ability to access information*
- b) *Synthesize information to address and issue.*

Complete the following tasks:

1. **Meet the Librarian of Congress** in this three-plus minute video. (<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2016/02/24/meet-president-obamas-nominee-librarian-congress>)
2. Watch this four-minute video **See Inside the Library of Congress**. (<https://www.today.com/news/see-inside-library-congress-where-historic-archives-are-now-being->

t110177?utm_content=buffer9fc9&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer)

3. Next, go to the **Library of Congress** site. (<https://loc.gov>)
4. Explore the site (spend at least 10 minutes).
5. Respond to the questions below. Your comments should include:
 - What information about Dr. Carla Hayden and/or the Library of Congress did you most enjoy learning about in the videos?
 - A description and explanation of what you found interesting in your virtual visit to the Library of Congress.
 - Provide the link (URL) of the specific page so others can find it

We were surprised at how thoroughly this assignment engaged students and at their thoughtful and well-written responses. Many told us they bookmarked the site so they could return often and explore further. More than one expressed a desire to go there in person to visit!

Excerpts from student responses:

1. I visited the Library of Congress website on Monday, September 11th, 2017. Featured on the homepage was a link to a documentary project collection dedicated to September 11th, 2001. What I found interesting in this collection was that it contained drawings from children, photographs displaying community responses to the attacks, and interviews from people who witnessed the attacks firsthand. I listened to a few minutes of an interview by Lillie Haws, and it is bone chilling to go back sixteen years and relive the attacks on the World Trade Center. I really loved that this collection included personal interviews because it provides a raw insight to what people experienced on the day that ultimately changed the United States forever.
2. The Library of Congress was so fascinating to me, from the entire structure to the very fine detailed architectural art within the building itself. The most amazing part of this learning experience was when Dr. Carla Hayden stated that every single book ever printed was held in this very library! I got goosebumps when they were looking at Thomas Jefferson's and Lincoln's actual handwriting; it was not a picture; it was not a remake; it was their actual penmanship right there! I found it a bit insane that they weren't wearing gloves? After watching these videos, I went straight to The Library of Congress website to locate the digital copies of some of the artifacts they stated in the video and it was so easy to locate and view. This site will be added to my home screen to be of use in future projects as well as a reminder to take a visit soon!
3. The information about Dr. Carla Hayden that I found most interesting in the videos was that during the time of unrest in Baltimore, Maryland, she kept the library open as a place of refuge for the public as a way to show her support to the community. I especially enjoyed her remark about creating an environment of inclusion for all people, because it shows her dedication to the public.

4. The module about the Library of Congress alone was worth the price of admission for this course. I can now say, I access that website and information almost weekly. Being a history buff, it has become my "go to" source of historical information and data.

Adding Humor with Comics

Adding humor is another way to engage students, and humor created by others can be just as effective as your own. Instructors can easily liven up a lesson by displaying colorful graphics or by inserting humor with relevant comics. (Be sure to give credit to the source.) We often include a relevant comic strip, for example, in announcements in course modules and require (or encourage) students to respond with an explanation regarding its relevance to information literacy.

While many comic strips over the years have addressed topics related to information literacy, one of our favorites is the strip "Zits" by J. Scott and J. Borgman (<https://www.comicskingdom.com/zits/archive>). The main character, Jeremy Duncan, is a 16 year old high school sophomore often looking for the easiest way to get things done whether it's calling his mom and asking her to look up a definition on the internet while he is sitting in the library or buying a term paper off the internet and explaining to his teacher that it is "crowd-sourced" not plagiarized.

Offering extra credit to students who reply describing the humor or irony depicted in the comic or graphic will usually get a response. "The ha-ha of humor in the classroom may indeed contribute to the 'aha' of learning from the student" (Gamer, 2008). We have often found this to be the case.

Is it all CRAAP? Internet Research and Evaluating Sources



From:
<http://www.ilovelibraries.org/librariestransform/article/well-traveled-message>

*Anybody can post anything on the Internet. Even our students know that. At least they do by the end of the course! Therefore, we explain that it is important to think carefully about the search results from Google and other web browsers (usually the first place they go for research). While there is a huge amount of valuable material available online, **an evaluation process is key to finding quality content on the Internet.***

We have to remind students that there is more information available than what is on the Internet. Not everything is digital. Boots on the ground, interviewing people as sources, and plowing through library archives that do not exist online are also valuable ways to find information, and sometimes the only way to find the needed information.

To help students understand this, we focus on these concepts in our course:

- **Evaluate** -- To determine the significance or worth by careful appraisal and study
- **Fact** – A piece of information presented as having objective reality
- **Knowledge** – An understanding or skill gained from experience or education
- **CRAAP Test** – A method for evaluating information, especially from websites (Currency; Relevance; Accuracy; Authority; Purpose)
- **Filter Bubble** – A narrow view of the world resulting from algorithms that present personalized and one-sided news

Understanding the *CRAAP test* for evaluating resources, the effects of the *filter-bubble phenomenon* on individual search results, and the difference between facts and knowledge will enable confidence in evaluating results when searching for information online. Students are asked to locate and evaluate a predetermined website using the CRAAP test by addressing the following:

- **Currency** -- Is a given piece of information current? Is it important to have the most recent information for your topic?
- **Relevance** -- Does this information relate to your topic? Who is the audience for the information?
- **Accuracy** -- Is the information correct? How does it compare to other sites? Is it peer-reviewed?
- **Authority** – Is the author easily identified? What are his/her credentials? Is contact information available?
- **Purpose** -- What is the purpose of the site? Is the information biased?

This process gives students a concrete tool to use when looking at a resource and attempting to evaluate its validity.

Assignment: Beware of Filter Bubbles

Learning Outcomes:

- a) Articulate the ethical and legal use of information*
- b) Evaluate information sources.*

Based on one's internet search history, computer algorithms often produce search results that are skewed, leaving out results that might provide a more balanced view. The searcher is often unaware that the results have been filtered. The following assignment raises awareness about how the Internet collects information regarding the online activity and personal preferences of users.

Take some time to watch and think about these two videos:

- *How Filter Bubbles Isolate You* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTk1kDIRnw>)

- Eli Pariser's TED Talk *Beware Online 'Filter Bubbles.'*
(https://www.ted.com/talks/eli_pariser_beware_online_filter_bubbles?language=en)

Reflect on your own experiences. Respond thoughtfully to these questions. Use details from both the video and the Ted Talk to support general statements.

1. How does the filter bubble phenomenon affect your own experience of current events?
 2. Can you think of other instances when you have wondered about the credibility of a particular story or source? Do you see any positive aspects of the effects of filter bubbles?
 3. What are the long-term consequences of an increasingly segregated internet?
- Use this reflection to explore both realities and possibilities for change.

It is important for Internet users to be aware of the snapshot via personal information that sites such as Google capture. Learning to navigate sites such as Google and Facebook without allowing them to manipulate one's personal preferences is an important part of being an educated person. The following responses illustrate student perceptions of this issue.

Excerpts from student responses:

1. There is not an article or story that I read where I do not worry about the credibility of the source. It seems that everyone thinks they are right and it is very hard to tell the difference between fact and opinion. Much of what people consider "fact" has to do with their political stance. The long-term consequences of a segregated Internet are very scary. It puts the foundation of our constitution at risk. The framers of the constitution included free press for good reason. It is a way to keep the people informed and provides citizens the ability to "check" the government. If we can see or search what we want, and we rely on algorithms created by Corporate America to show us what they think we want to see, than I feel we are putting free press at risk. There needs to be a limit to ensure that we have options, and that we are aware of how the info and stories are being presented to us.
2. My bubble filter represents who I am and what I search for, but I don't have the ability to choose what I see, or don't see. More importantly, I don't get to see what gets edited out. Most of the time, I see friends posting news articles with catchy titles. The long-term consequences of an increasingly segregated internet are violence, hostility, and narrow-mindedness. If a person is only seeing information that aligns with their beliefs, they will not be open-minded to other viewpoints. As individuals, we need to be challenged. Having our beliefs challenged helps us to grow.
3. I think filter bubbles essentially insulate the person from outside influences and reinforce what the individual already thinks. It also affects my social media newsfeed of Facebook, and twitter. I do not see any positive aspects of the filter

bubble, because we find ourselves in filter bubbles any time we are only surrounded by views and people's opinions we agree with, while being sheltered. I think they distort our understanding of the world and hamper our ability to make balanced decisions, and lifestyle choices.

The Legacy of Teaching Information Literacy

'In a world in which most careers are built more on what you can find out rather than what you already know, you can hardly call yourself an educated person'....without being information literate (Badke 2017, p. xviii).

Teaching information literacy online as a general education requirement is both a pleasure and a challenge. *Information Literacy in Higher Education*, an asynchronous course, is organized by weekly modules using the CANVAS Learning Management System. Teaching strategies in each module based on chapters from the e-book, *Research Strategies: Finding Your Way through the Information Fog*, 6th edition by William Badke, provide structure for the course and prove to be popular among students. Reading assignments and visual content such as videos, power point slides, and handouts introduce concepts. Discussion board prompts and reflection questions provide opportunities for student interaction and dialogue with instructors. Weekly Skills Check Quizzes monitor student mastery of four major learning outcomes as the course progresses. A Final Comprehensive Skills Check, completed at the end of the course, serves as the tool to provide data for mastery of the course learning outcomes to the university's General Education Assessment Committee.

In addition, student surveys submitted at the end of the course reveal that most students find the course more useful than expected and admit that it will be helpful in the future. However, one reluctant student commented that the course was a "waste of time" except that he did learn about library databases, which will help find "better stuff." Other students expressed that the professor's lighthearted approach (humor) eased uncertainty and anxiety about course assignments. They also acknowledged that persistent practice of topical searches increased navigational skills and built confidence for research in other classes. This engagement sparks interest and raises awareness of key concepts, like peer review, how to avoid plagiarism, and the authority and value of information. Overall, students seem to gain insight into real research.

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