2009

An Introduction to the Library Research Component of Communication-B Courses

The criteria for courses satisfying part B of the General Education Communication Requirement include addressing advanced information literacy skills. The information literacy component of Comm-B is intended to introduce students to “the productive use of core library resources specific to disciplinary inquiry.” Students in Comm-B should learn about how information is produced and disseminated in a discipline, as well as the skills and strategies needed to find, evaluate and use information in the discipline.

Because the information literacy component of Comm-B is intended to build upon the basic library skills and strategies taught in Comm-A, it is helpful to know what is covered in that first course. All students who take Comm-A (i.e., 75% of the freshman class) complete CLUE, a Web-based, multimedia tutorial and attend a hands-on instruction session in the library. After completing this “library module,” students should be able to, at an introductory level, find books and articles, construct a search strategy, describe the characteristics of a scholarly journal article, and get help. You should encourage students who have not taken Comm. A (e.g. tested out, transfer students, etc.) to complete CLUE, which is available on the Web at: http://clue.library.wisc.edu/.

The Instruction Coordinator in your library can help you design and implement a library research component customized to the needs of your Comm-B course. We can work with you to determine what’s most appropriate and develop instructional support to enable your students to be successful. We offer the following instructional support services:

1) Research Assignment Design Consultations. Librarians can offer suggestions on how to craft an assignment that will emphasize the research process, rather than just the final product. We can also assure that there are no logistical roadblocks, that adequate resources are available, that students are guided to quality sources, and that students are supported at key points in the research process.

2) Teaching. Library staff meet with 2,500 classes a year across campus, most of which are course-related sessions requested by faculty and instructors. We would be happy to discuss whether an instruction session in the library would be the most pedagogically effective approach for your assignment. In some cases, instructors prefer to teach their students research skills, and in some libraries it may be possible to use a library classroom for this purpose.

3) Handouts and Web Materials. We can provide you with instructional handouts and Web materials developed to help students with the research process. We can create a customized handout or Library Course Page (http://www.library.wisc.edu/lcp/) that is delivered through MyUW or Learn@UW. Library course pages can include electronic reserve materials, recommended resources, and other library-related instructional content. In addition to these customized support materials, the library has ready-made research help on the web such as research tips and tricks and ask-a-librarian services.

4) Workshops. Each semester the library offers free workshops on topics such as finding books and articles, Google for Academic Research, and managing your search results using RefWorks. With advance notice, we can arrange for your class to attend a free workshop or customize a workshop for your course.

The information literacy and library research components of Comm-B have an important role in preparing students for their careers and lifelong learning. By introducing students to academic research in authentic and engaging environments and providing them the support they need to be successful, librarians can help make your course more effective. With that in mind, here are some tips as you plan for the information literacy component of your Comm-B course:

- The information literacy component should be assignment-based and fully integrated into your course. Students are more motivated to “learn by doing” when the practice is closely linked to an assignment that is relevant to the classroom learning experience.

- Students should learn both skills and strategies, combine the “how to” of information seeking with the “why” and “when.”
The research assignment should emphasize the role critical thinking plays in the information-seeking process. For students, the challenge is in learning to weed through and evaluate information.

The research assignment needs to focus on the process of research, not just the outcome. Students need to reflect on the research process and its significance in the context of the discipline.

Be sure to address the affective component of the research process. Many undergraduates experience “library anxiety” and reinforcing the importance of library research and assistance available to students is an important outcome of Comm-B.

Regardless of how you design the information literacy component of your class, consultation with librarians is critical. For some multiple-section classes, planning needs to be done at the course rather than the section level.

To discuss the library research component of your Comm-B course, you should contact Sarah McDaniel, campus Coordinator for Library & Information Literacy Instruction. The Coordinator can be reached by phone at 262-4308 and by email at libinstruct@library.wisc.edu.

For more general information about the campus Library Instruction Program and the services we provide to faculty and instructional staff, please check out our library instruction Web site at:
http://www.library.wisc.edu/inst-services/.

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