

Back to High School: A College and High School Collaboration to Teach Information Literacy

Cardinal Stritch University

Project Description

Our Ideas to Action grant funded a collaborative group of high school and college faculty and high school and college librarians to design an information literacy curriculum that could be taught in high school.

Project Team

The members of our project team were already affiliated with the Cardinal Stritch University Concurrent Enrollment Program. This gave us shared disciplinary courses to work with, as well as shared knowledge of the basic curriculum. Our team consisted of:

High School faculty: Andy Berens, Divine Savior Holy Angels High School and Paul Pasquesi, St. Thomas More High School.

High School librarian: Christina Thiele, Divine Savior Holy Angels High School;

Cardinal Stritch University faculty: Dave Riordan and Laura Misco; and

Cardinal Stritch University Librarians: Laurie Swartwout and Dyan Barbeau.

Project Development:

Our team met a total of six times. We first discussed the biggest challenges in information literacy for both high school and college students. These challenges include:

- Understanding source types, especially internet sources;
- Evaluating and choosing sources that are appropriate for research;
- Choosing topics and engaging with them;
- Approaching the research process as finding an “answer, “rather than as a fluid process of questioning and answering;
- Understanding the role of research in the writing process;
- Summarizing, paraphrasing, and integrating sources.

The central theme of these challenges was engagement—with research and with their topics. As educators and librarians, we tell students to write about a topic that interests them. But how is that interest or curiosity sparked? This became the central theme of our sessions.

Our process was to look at the curriculum for the Irish Literature and World Religion courses taught by our high school faculty. Throughout our next meetings, we discussed ideas for related information literacy lessons and assignments. The high school and college librarians shared their instruction experiences and lessons. We also considered both the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education, as well as the AASL Standards Framework for

Learners. Our focus remained on the curricular outcomes and how we could teach the research process.

In the Irish Literature course, we discussed how an Irish history topic could be analyzed through a variety of viewpoints, both subject (geographical, religious, historical, financial, literary) and personal and how these viewpoints could change over time. The primary course learning outcome related to this theme was for students to “recognize and articulate the impact of Irish culture (laws, mores, religious beliefs, historical context) on Irish writers (the impact of culture on the Irish writers could be positive, negative, or mixed.)”

In regard to these outcomes and our discussions, the instructor created an assignment which required students to identify a historical event, select two defined perspectives of people or groups of people that reacted to this event and find primary and secondary sources that supported their analysis.

The curriculum of the World Religions course focused on a methodological approach to studying religions. Students learn about religion and religious culture by examining its history, architecture, music, language, archaeology, and other aspects. This class also focused on lenses of awareness (e.g., historical, cultural, contemporary, ethical, spiritual, scientific, secular) in religious/theological thinking and ritualizing.

Given these assignments, and our goal of engaging students in the research process, we adopted the idea of a guided research plan from a similar assignment developed by Susan Archambault, "Research Exploration Exercise." *CORA (Community of Online Research Assignments)*, 2015. <https://www.projectcora.org/assignment/research-exploration-exercise>.

This assignment breaks down the research assignment into parts, demonstrating the ongoing process of research as students select a topic, find general “background” information about the topic, use their information to find key words and develop a focus and select key databases for secondary sources. In other words, using general and specific sources to build their research. We intended this step by step approach to not only teach the research process, but also to encourage interest and engagement.

We found that the “guided research” idea could be used in multiple disciplines, in our case, both literature and religion; and with multiple assignments, such as a research paper in the literature course or a presentation or gallery walk in the religion course. Rather than have students find web sources for their assignment, the librarians made the deliberate decision to provide students with the internet sources to use. We did this both to avoid students’ frustration of “not being able to find anything” and to expose students to high-quality, reliable internet information that is appropriate for scholarly research.

This assignment primarily addresses “Research as Inquiry” and “Searching as Strategic Exploration” frames of the ACRL standards. It further addresses the correlating frames of “Inquire” and “Explore” from the ASSL standards.

Project Implementation:

Our campus and both high schools shut down days after our March meeting. The Irish literature course instructor planned to introduce the assignment during the spring semester, and when that didn't work, the fall semester. However, the switch to online education in both of these semesters prohibited following through with the assignment. The World Religions course did use our assignment in Fall, 2020 with two projects in the course: Church Music and Interpretation: Developing Information Literacy and Church Architecture and Meaning: Developing Information Literacy. All of the assignments we created can be located here, as well as some supplemental assignments that could be used for teaching information literacy concepts associated with the bigger assignment.

Advice:

The structure of our meetings worked well. By sharing our ideas about information literacy challenges for students, we fairly quickly developed our goal of engaging students in the research process. We then examined both the assignment and curricular learning outcomes of our two courses and adapted our assignments to achieve the outcomes. What this project took was time to discuss our ideas, to share curriculum, to find, and adapt assignments. The project assignments also required a substantial amount of research for sources that were both free and assessable. However, the assignment could be modified to explore a website or encyclopedia and essentially achieve the learning goals.

Covid-19 really derailed our efforts on this project. The disruption in the semesters and the length of time which passed between creating the assignment and instruction caused us to lose momentum. However, our greater goal of college and high school faculty working together to create substantive information literacy instruction was achieved and could be fairly easily replicated.