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Increasing first-year information literacy sessions

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The path to full participation: Increasing the number of first-year experience information literacy sessions

By: Jennifer Little Kegler

At the College at Brockport, SUNY, most first year students are required to take the Academic Planning Seminar (APS), a one credit pass/fail course, that introduces them to college life, learning skills, careers, and the information and ideas necessary to plan a successful academic program. It is taught by faculty and staff from departments across campus, and some sections are grouped by major while others are more interdisciplinary in nature. In 2005 the number of first-year experience classes had dropped to an all-time low, averaging 5 out of 55 total sections. The traditional “library tour” was outdated, embedded sessions in an introductory communications class had been tried for one year and failed, and librarians were frustrated at the lack of involvement with first-year students.

Instruction librarians worked together to design a more engaging information literacy session for these first-year students. Curricular strategies included involvement with the training of the first-year experience faculty, a “hands-on assignment” built on the common first-year reading book, and inclusion in the course template and communication board for all APS instructors. Changes were made to the course, based on student feedback collected at the end of each session. Three years ago the course objectives were formalized in collaboration with the English department’s composition program. Many freshmen take English 112 (Brockport’s introductory English course) in the fall or spring semester of their first year, so the library instruction was scaffolded so that students would not have information repeated between the two sessions. Currently, the APS session instructs students on how to locate information and the subsequent ENG112 session adds how to evaluate and synthesize information effectively. Over a nine year period the library instruction team increased the participation of first-year experience sections from less than 10 percent to almost 100 percent. (For more information see our APS research guide at <http://library.brockport.edu/aps/goals>).

During the fall of 2014 librarians were involved in the Assessment in Action program through ACRL which developed a multiple choice test to test students’ learning from these sessions and the results showed, for some questions, a significant change in student learning (see the poster results at: <http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/drakepubs/21>). These results, along with ACRL’s revision of the information literacy standards, will influence the evolution of the course objectives as well as those in other areas of the Brockport curriculum. Other co-curricular strategies to reach out to first-year students have included visits from the Freshmen Council, Library special events where participation by freshmen is particularly high, and new technologies such as the 3D printer being demonstrated to freshmen. Librarian involvement in Faculty Learning Communities and the College Senate has strengthened our ties with faculty

and has led to a campus-wide discussion and revision of information literacy goals in the general education curriculum.