

Using Student-Centered Learning to Teach Basic Source Evaluation: A Collaboration between Communication Studies and Murphy Library

By Sharon Hamilton, Murphy Library & Pamela Morris, Communication Studies

Introduction

The Library Day assignment is used for all CST 110 students each semester, beginning in Fall 2012. The assignment addresses two pedagogical goals: to incorporate student-centered learning techniques to increase information literacy among UWL students. **Information literacy** is the natural extension of the concept of literacy in our information society. According to Christine Bruce, "Information literacy is the catalyst required to transform the information society of today into the learning society of tomorrow." Information literacy is important in that critical evaluation of sources is a recurring problem among college students, and manifests itself in poorly cited papers and the use of non-credible information sources. **Student-centered learning (SCI)** is defined as "an instructional approach in which students influence the content, activities, materials, and pace of learning...The instructor provides students with opportunities to learn independently and from one another and coaches them in the skills they need to do so effectively...Properly implemented SCI can lead to increased motivation to learn, greater retention of knowledge, deeper understanding, and more positive attitudes towards the subject being taught"¹(Collins & O'Brien, 2003).

Other reasons the CST 110 Library Day activity was created include:

- It fulfills a general education requirement.
- It is introduction to basic information literacy skills.
- It is designed to combat poorly cited papers and the use of non-credible information.
- It is a partnership between Communication Studies Department and Murphy Library.
- It addresses a means for student success.



Students complete the pre and post test on their own through D2L.

Assessment Questions

- Question 1: The .org domain sites:
- Are always non-profit organizations that are reputable.
 - Contain reputable non-profit organizations with always reliable information.
 - Contain only advocacy group web sites with political agendas.
 - Must be critically evaluated because this domain contains both very reputable non-profit organization web sites and advocacy groups with hidden agendas.

- Question 2: Which of these is TRUE about scholarly publications?
- They always contain the word "Journal" in the title.
 - The articles are carefully documented and contain references or a works cited list.
 - They contain articles written at the reading level of the general public.
 - They contain short articles written by journalists.

- Question 3: What information do you know about a website with this URL? <http://www.enydata.us.gov/statistics>
- It is published by an educational institution.
 - It is trying to sell something.
 - You cannot gather any information from a URL.
 - It is published by a government agency.

- Question 4: Any sources from the library will be acceptable to use in your research.
- True False

- Question 5: You're doing research for your paper, and you find a website whose "About Us" tab lists an e-mail address and the name of a person but gives no additional information or credentials. What do you do?
- Use the website as one of your sources of information. Everything on the web that looks professional is appropriate to include.
 - Ask your professor whether the person is an expert in the website's focus.
 - Contact the person listed as author to ask about his or her credentials.
 - Look for another website written by a person or organization with good credentials.

- Question 6: Wikipedia can be part of your research process.
- True False

- Question 7: A citation is:
- A long quote used to strengthen a research paper.
 - Information about a research paper including the author, title, and date.
 - A brief summary of a resource.
 - A type of government document.

- Question 8: You are writing a speech about gun violence and you use information from the National Rifle Association (NRA) website. In this example, which website evaluation criteria do you need to pay attention to the most?

- Question 9: If you are looking for journals articles for a term paper topic, which of these statements reflects the BEST course of action?

- Question 10: An abstract is:

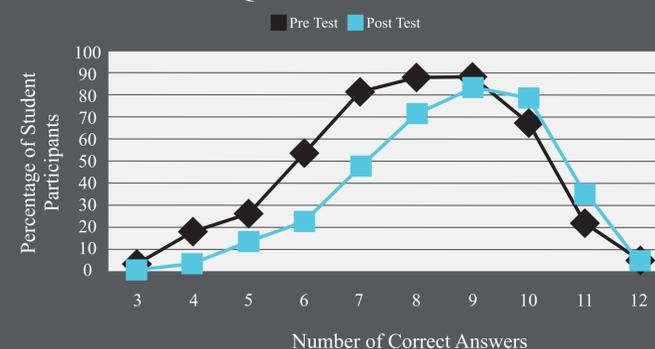
- Question 11: How do you know if someone is an authority on climate change?

- Question 12: In critically evaluating information sources you should consider all EXCEPT:
- the timeliness of the information.
 - the credentials of the author.
 - the length of the information source.
 - the accuracy of the information.

Results

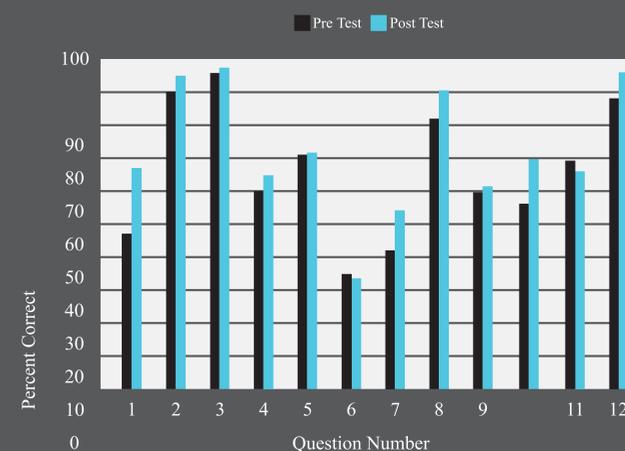
Improvement was greatest among students who scored in the middle range. We would like to increase this improvement by several more points. Students who scored poorly on the pre-test did not show much improvement on the post-test. We need to investigate the source of this issue.

Per-Question Results



The key questions that proved difficult for students included: 1, 4, 5, 6, and 7. In particular students struggled most with Question 6 which asks about using Wikipedia. Conversely, students did very well on questions 2, 3, and 12. This information tells us which concepts need more attention during Library Day.

Percent Correct Per Question - Pre and Post Test -



Results indicate need for reinforcement of concepts in questions such as Number 6 which addresses the use of Wikipedia, while students performed well on questions 2, 3, and 12.

Future Directions

Future directions for this work include:

- Use the results of assessment thus far to guide instructor and librarian focus for the Spring 2014 Library Day. For example, librarians and instructors will target concepts that our assessment indicated that students scored poorly on.
- Use 2013-2014 assessment results to guide activity redesign for 2014-2015. For example, the topic and resources in the activity may be changed to keep the assignment interesting and relevant for students.
- Coordinate with the *Library Guide on the Side* grant team to provide a blended approach to the topic of Information Literacy in CST 110.

Assignment

Evaluating Your Sources: CST 110 Introduction

In the Google age, it's easy to find information, but how do you make sure you are using quality information? Past CST 110 students used the source highlighted on your worksheet in a persuasive speech on identity theft. On your own, locate the source (most are available through the Murphy Library website), review and evaluate the source, and determine whether or not you would use it if you were presenting a persuasive speech on identity theft.

Please bring your completed worksheet to library day. You will have about five minutes to meet in your pre-assigned group during library day (your instructor will be assigning 3-5 students the same source to evaluate). In your group, you will decide on points to share with the class. Each group will have about five minutes to share their findings.

Students use a combination of handouts, Google documents, Youtube videos, library guides, websites, and the library catalog to complete the assignment with their group members.

Image of the assignment

Library Catalog

One of Five Youtube Videos

Library Guide

Sample of sources given to student groups:

- Copes, H. & Veraitis, L. (2012). *Identity thieves: Motives and methods*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Reys, B.W. (2013). Online routines and identity theft victimization: Further expanding routine activity theory beyond direct-contact offenses. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*. (50)2, 2 16-238.

Sample questions from student worksheet:

- List your steps to locating this resource. Was it easy to find the source? Why or why not?
- Does bias exist? If yes, how would you report on/counter bias?
- Would you use this source for your speech? Why or why not?

¹ Collins, J. W., 3rd, & O'Brien, N. P. (Eds.). (2003). *Greenwood Dictionary of Education*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.