Our project assessed learning outcomes for first-year students involved in library instruction through their Earlham Seminar II in spring semester, 2013. We implemented the “retro” assessment model in which ACRL Information Literacy Standards were first assessed in students’ knowledge prior to library instruction, then taught in course-embedded library instruction, and then reassessed later in the semester (Pancek 2004). We administered two surveys (hereafter referred to as pre-assessment and post-assessment) which provided multiple choice and true/false questions aimed at gauging student proficiency in locating “needed information effectively and efficiently,” as well as evaluating “information and its sources critically” (ACRL 2000). The post-assessment also included an optional text response question asking students what they wish had been instructed about in the first library instruction session but were not. The post-assessment included an opportunity for class discussion to address issues that remained unclear. The attached spreadsheet provides the surveys used for both assessments and the data gathered. A total of 71 students responded to the pre-assessment and 57 to the post-
All students were required over the course of the semester to carry out at least one research project for their Earlham Seminar.

Notably, in response to a question asking where they would turn for an authoritative introduction on the topic of “the rise of the modern university,” 72% reported Google in the pre-assessment, a figure that went down to 44% in the post-assessment. As part of the follow-up discussion for the post-assessment, we instructed students about the usefulness of Google Scholar in contrast to simple Google searching, since Google Scholar indexes scholarly materials and also links to full-texts owned by Earlham.

In the pre-assessment, a question asking where students would find a “peer-reviewed article” indicated that 42% of students would look to newspapers such as the New York Times. The post-assessment dropped that figure down to 23% and a teachable moment emerged in which we discussed the genres of journalistic versus academic writing, and the fact that while a reputable newspaper may contain reliable and useful information, it is not “peer-reviewed” in the sense of scholarly research process and vetting for academic publication.

In at least two of the four post-assessment sessions, the teaching faculty took a heightened interest in responses and appeared enlightened to discover that students were not yet comfortably familiar with terms like “primary source” and “secondary source.” This outreach to faculty numbers counts as one of the fruitful outcomes of the project.

Flaws in the survey instruments proved to be use of the terms “monograph” and “library database,” jargon familiar to librarians but not to students. However, while students were unsure what one means by a “library database,” the post-assessment showed that they grasped well the concept of licensed electronic collections by using the commercial names, i.e. JSTOR and Academic Search Premier.
In the text responses for the post-assessment, an overwhelming cry went up about citation—when to cite, where to cite, how to cite. Citation, a vital ethical, intellectual as well as technical issue, does not appear to be covered in sufficient detail through first-year library instruction, and perhaps through first-year instruction as a whole at Earlham.

In one of the four post-assessment sessions, the faculty member was away from campus and the students opened up in a frank conversation with the two of us administering the post-assessment. The students asserted, even strongly, that they wish they had known about library materials in their first semester at Earlham. They went on to say that they knew of fellow first-year students who, now in their second semester at Earlham, “still don’t know about JSTOR,” as the students put it.

Nevertheless, only 51% of students indicated in the post-assessment that they had visited a librarian for a one-on-one research consultation. We take this to be a marketing issue for Earlham Libraries, both in outreach to faculty in support of their courses and in direct outreach to the students themselves.

Bibliography


http://www.alan/alral/standards/informationliteracycompetency