2012

An Information Literacy Summer Assignment: Digital Learning Materials for the First Year Experience

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Overview

Trinity University enrolls approximately 2400 undergraduate students, with an entering first-year class of ~600. As part of a campus-wide summer reading assignment, librarians and technologists were tasked with creating an online information literacy assignment, in which students were to complete an annotated bibliography related to the summer reading selection. The end result—an interactive website--combined instructional design, assessment, and usability design, and student work on the assignment was (optionally) incorporated into First Year Seminars.

Background

The Summer Reading Annotated Bibliography assignment began in summer 2008 at the suggestion of several faculty attending an information literacy workshop hosted by the library. Initially a writing assignment turned in by students attending the library's new student orientation, since 2010 it has been a wholly online module, comprised of guidelines, examples, research tutorials, pre- and post-surveys, and an interactive form. Submitted work is offered for review to fall First Year Seminar instructors, and top submissions are invited to attend a reception for the author of the Reading TUgether selection.

Goals

- **To prime new students to the idea that discovering, citing, and evaluating sources with sophisticated criteria are part of Trinity's suite of academic expectations.**
- **To give students hands-on experience using the library website and subscription databases.**
- **To provide First Year Seminar instructors with samples of their students' work prior to the first day of class.**
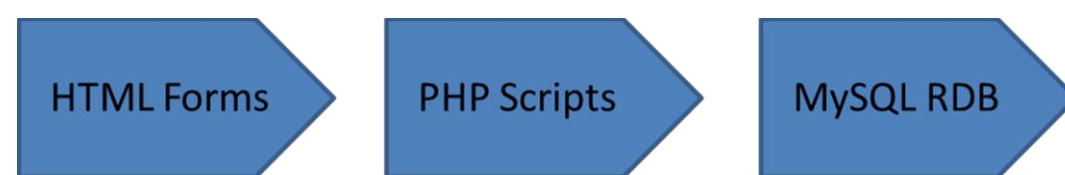
Instructional Design

This project represents an iterative attempt at applying Gagné's principles of instructional design to a mandated online assignment. Following is a mapping of each of Gagné's nine events of instruction to one or more elements of the research assignment's design.
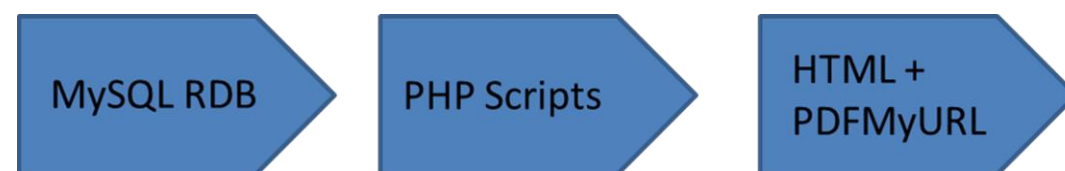
1. Gain attention → Email from Academic Affairs announcing the assignment, its due date (Aug. 1) and that it is required.

2. Tell learners the objective → Information Literacy outcomes stated on the site's homepage.

3. Stimulate recall of prior learning → Not explicitly addressed, though incorporated informally into the three screencast tutorials.

4. Tell or show the students what they are to do →Screencast tutorials perform the process; sample of exemplary work provided.

5. Provide learning guidance (alternate channels) → Written instructions, screencasts, examples, FAQs, and phone/emails support.

6. Elicit performance →students discover, cite, and annotate sources and submit their work.

7. Provide feedback → Students are asked to evaluate their own work using a rubric and are given the chance to revise their work and re-evaluate.

8. Assess performance →This is not done, with the exception of some spot-checking of individual submissions.

9. Enhance retention and transfer of learning→Done inconsistently when First Year seminar instructors respond to the offer to see their students' work (50%--10/20 asked to see student work).
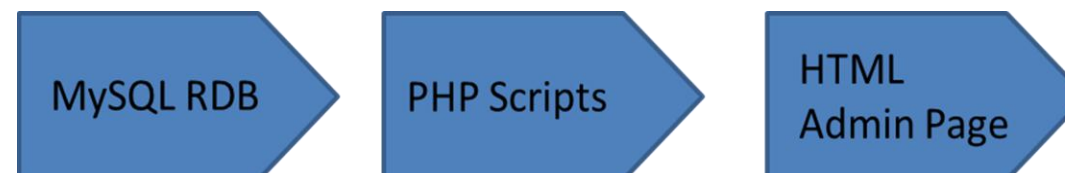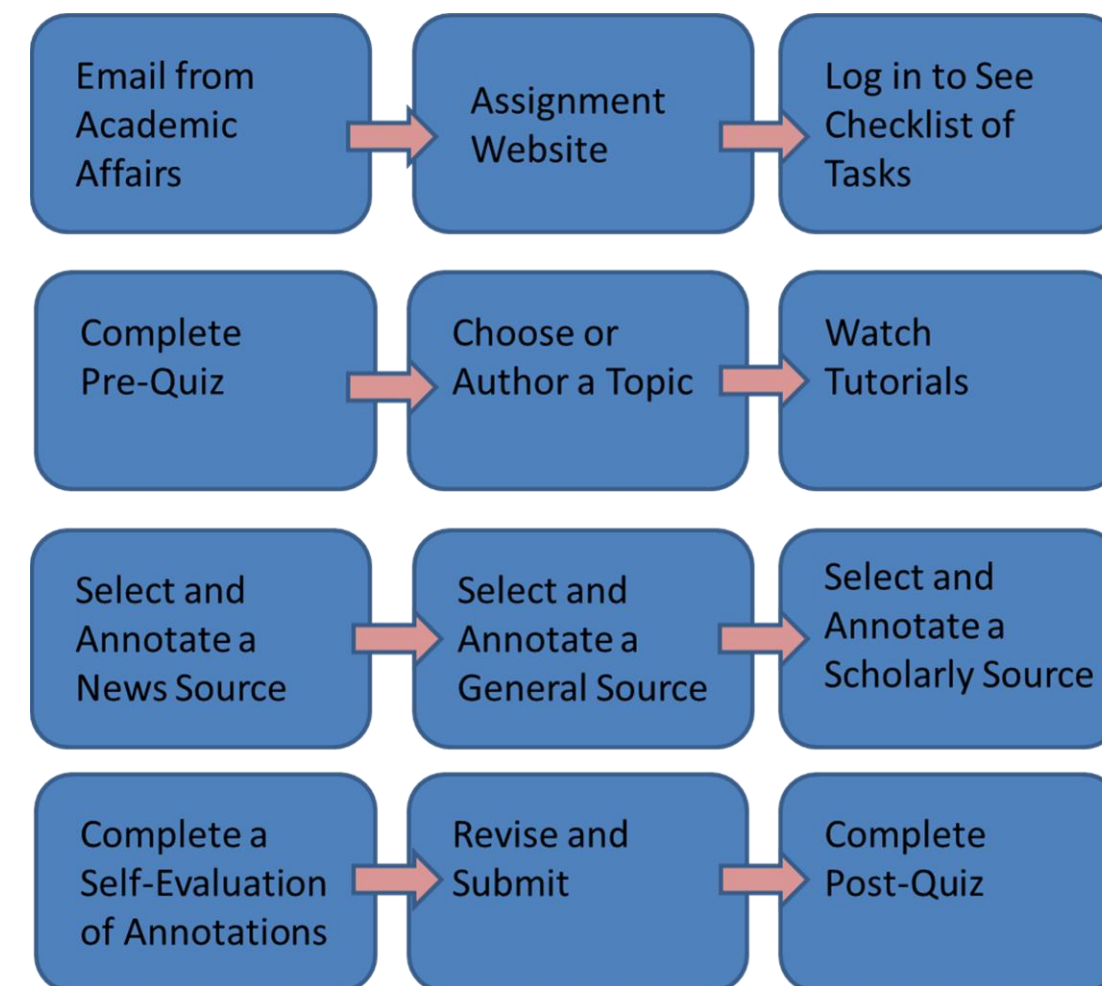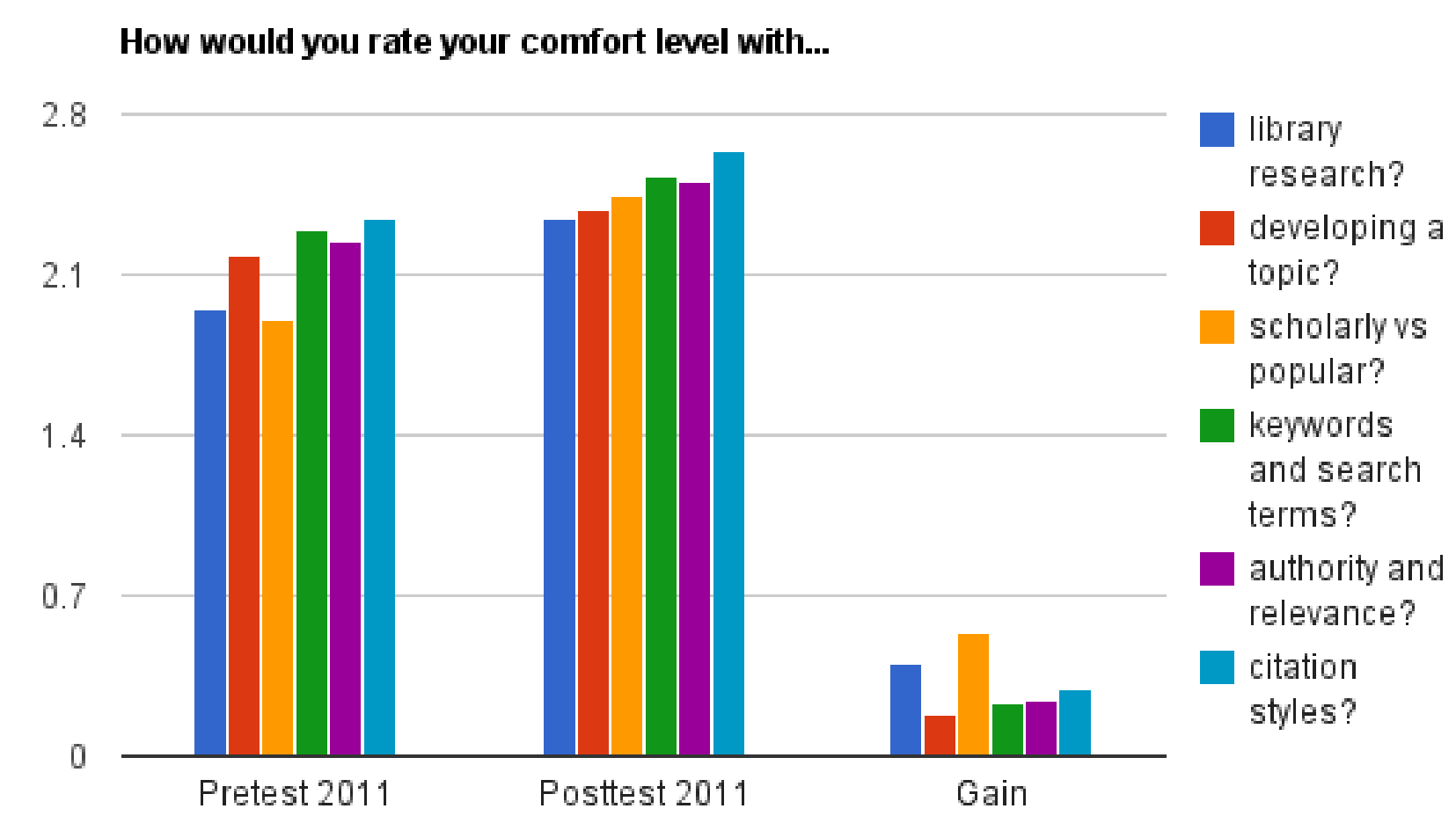
Technology

User Input:

HTML Forms → PHP Scripts → MySQL RDB

Server Output:

MySQL RDB → PHP Scripts → HTML + PDFMyURL

Administration:

MySQL RDB → PHP Scripts → HTML Admin Page

Student Workflow

Email from Academic Affairs → Assignment Website → Log in to See Checklist of Tasks

Complete Pre-Quiz → Choose or Author a Topic → Watch Tutorials

Select and Annotate a News Source → Select and Annotate a General Source → Select and Annotate a Scholarly Source

Complete a Self-Evaluation of Annotations → Revise and Submit → Complete Post-Quiz

The Self-Evaluation Rubric

Pre- and Post-Surveys of Library Skills (Self-Reported)
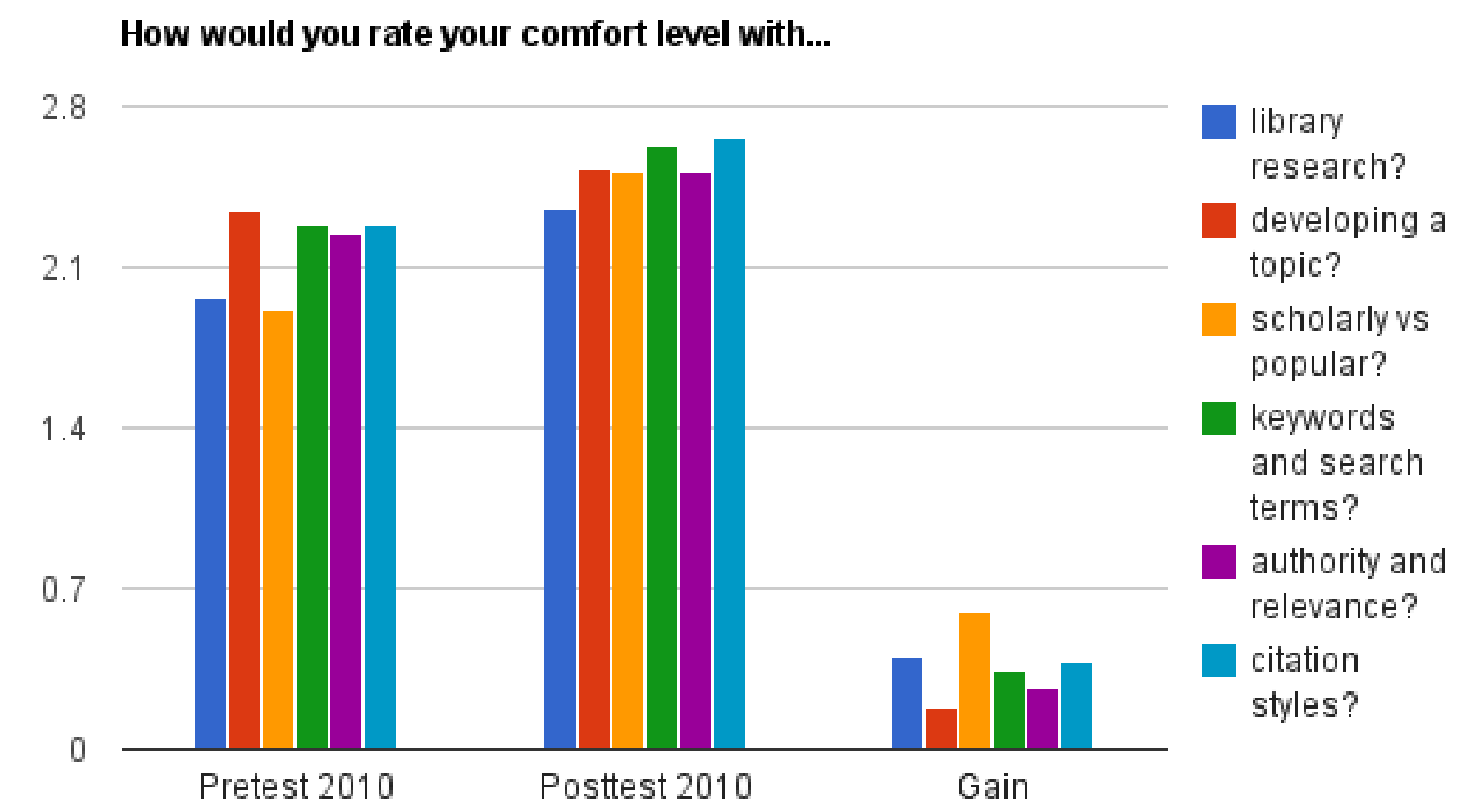
Sample of Completed Work

Assessment

Completion Data (2010 and 2011):

Full Effort: 2011: 457/600 (76%) 2010: 475/573 (83%)

Partial Effort: 2011: 56/600 (9%) 2010: 31/573 (5%)

Empty Submission: 2011: 40/600 (7%) 2010: 41/573 (7%)

No Effort: 2011: 47/600 (8%) 2010: 26/573 (5%)

Student Feedback (2011):

In your opinion, did the annotated bibliography assignment provide you with any new skills or knowledge regarding your research practices?

"I had just done a research project my senior year so I knew how to do an annotated bibliography."

"No. My high school taught me the vast majority of what we did, and this seemed more like busywork."

"I had never written an annotated bibliography before, so now i know. I also learned how to research on the trinity-approved databases, but the videos were too long and drawn out."

"It made me a little bit more familiar with navigating the Library website. But aside from that, it was a very simple research task."

"No. Those were a common practice back in my high school."

"Yes, I had never done an annotated bibliography before and learned how to approach one."

"Yes, I learned how to use the database on the Trinity library website. I also learned how to write an annotated bibliography."

"No, annotated bibliographies are something we did in 11th grade at my high school, so it was kind of standard."

"It helped with Ebsco skills, which is a tool I've used on every essay written at Trinity."

What improvements would you suggest for future summer reading assignments?

"Not require an annotated bibliography but connect it to the seminar classes so students can talk about it in seminar "

"I would say give a better topic to research. I think one of the reasons why I did not enjoy the assignment as much as I could have is because of the books and their related topics of choice."

"Decide to actually make it required or to make it purely optional. It was really frustrating to think it was a legitimate required assignment, spend a lot of time on it, and found out that no one else did it, and that there were no consequences for that."

"Don't make it seem required."

"I think the summer reading should be more connected to a class which you will take in the fall semester. Or better, it should connect with the lecture series that will be occurring throughout the fall."

"I could do the assignment without reading the book. I read about half of it."

"No future summer reading assignments."

"Make the people who actually do it receive some sort of credit or reward."

"Clearer instructions for each assignment part."

Assessment Cont.

Faculty Feedback (2011):

In your opinion, was the Annotated Bibliography Assignment useful to you and/or helpful to your students? Please explain.

"Yes, it's a useful resource for the students, since it walks them through the process step-by-step. Since they are expected to do that before starting the Fall term, then they will "get the message" when I tell them emphatically that I will be able to tell if their first essay is based on unreliable information, gotten from an unauthoritative source. I think the main value is that it gives them a glimpse of this huge and relatively easy-to-use resource that the Library provides, if only they use its databases."

"It was helpful to us. Not all students did it, but those who did were exposed to the nature of (early) college work, which is a positive!"

"It should have been useful in identifying the various types of sources and in the MLA way of citation."

Did having students' annotated bibliographies prior to the start of classes affect the bibliographic components of the course (e.g., planning of library instruction; involvement of liaison librarian)? If so, how?

"Yes. It reassured me that most of the class had already been exposed to the Information Literacy evaluative criteria that I was going to expect of them later and that they had already tried to use the databases accessible through the Library website. I gave the liaison a summary of what I found when I read the students' responses and it was likely useful to her, too. I was interesting to me, however, that more than half of the students' self-evaluations were way over-estimating the quality of their Information Literacy skills -- especially regarding the ability to assess the reliability and authoritativeness of the source."

"No, but it helped us see where there was a need for work and emphasis within the existing syllabus."

"It was difficult to determine that. The students had a large variety of backgrounds in formal paper writing and not all students completed the assignment (or if they did, I did not receive them)."

Conclusions

These data were drawn from too small a sample to provide conclusive evidence of design changes needed to better realize stated goals for the assignment. However, the need for better integration of student work on this assignment into the coursework of the first-year fall semester (Gagné's 9th event of instruction, "Enhance retention and transfer"), including grading of the work (Gagné's 8th event of instruction, "Assess performance test"). Additionally, Gagné's 3rd event of instruction, "Stimulate Prior Recall," could be more substantively addressed by the pre- and post- self-assessment of research skills. Currently, the self-reported comfort levels with various aspects of library research seem to indicate high levels of overconfidence, which, along with student feedback, suggests that the online exercise fails to signal to students that college-level research is significantly more challenging than what they experienced in high school.

Positively, the online assignment gives the majority of incoming students "time-on-task" with some of the same tools and critical thinking tasks they will be faced with in their first-year coursework, and does so in the context of a "low-stakes" environment. While information literacy learning outcomes are neither addressed nor expected from this assignment, the assignment raises both student and faculty awareness of the emphasis placed on information literacy at Trinity University.

References

Gagné, B., Briggs, L., & Wager, W. (1992). Principles of instructional design (4th ed.). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.