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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 Together 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.

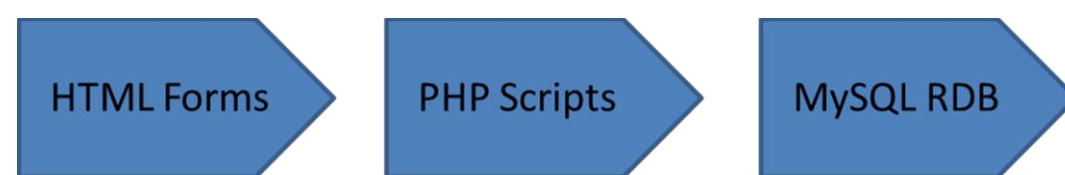
Instructional Design

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.

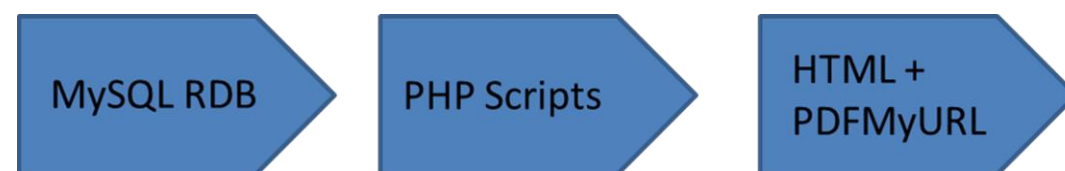
1. Gain attention → Email from Academic Affairs announcing the assignment, its due date (Aug. 1) and that it is required.
2. Tell learners the objective → Information Literacy outcomes stated on the site's homepage.
3. Stimulate recall of prior learning → Not explicitly addressed, though incorporated 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

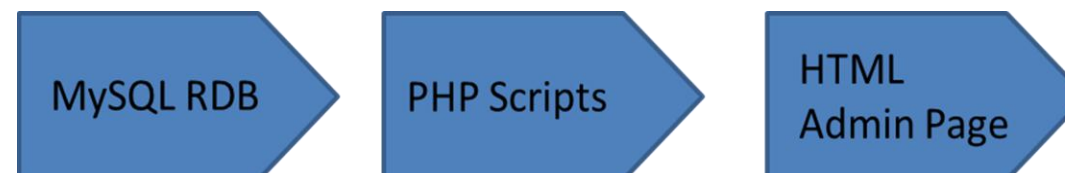
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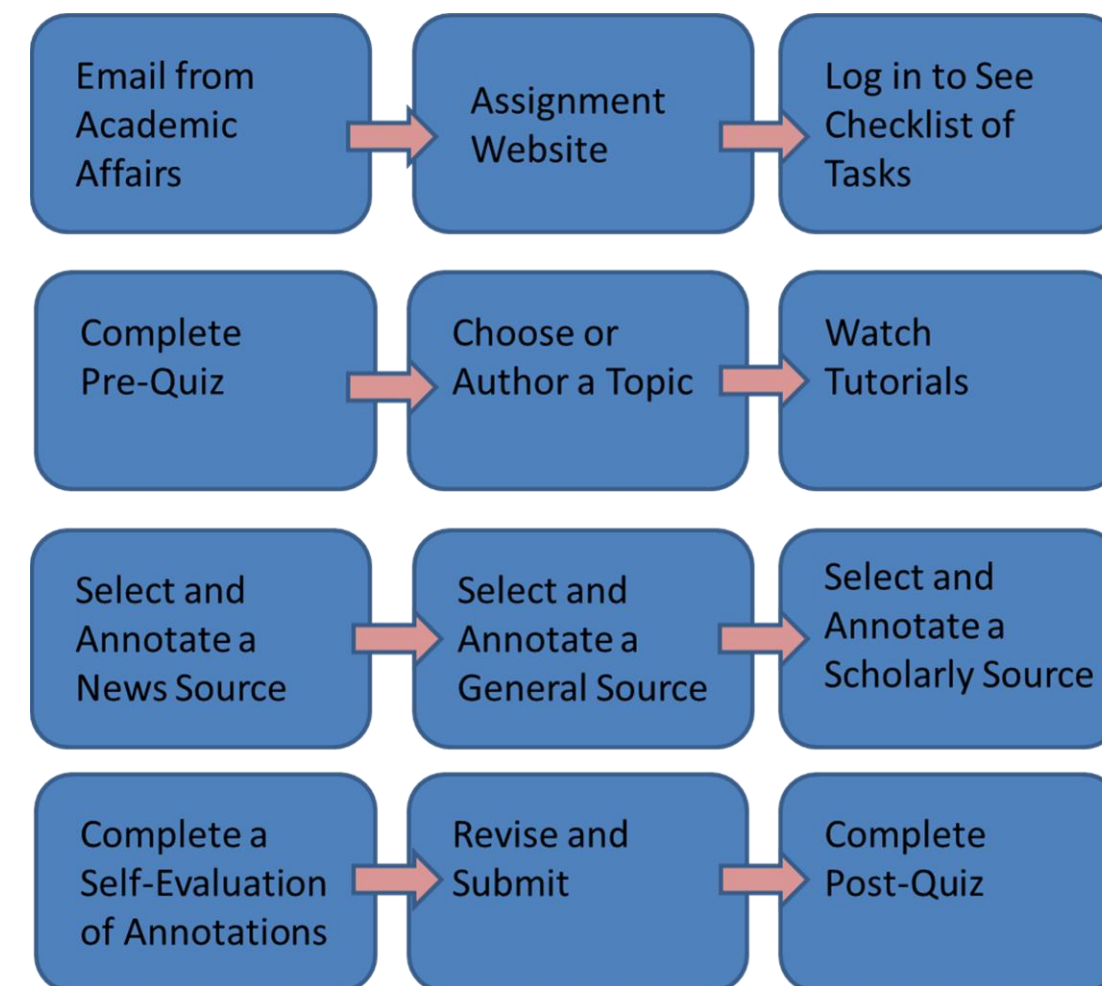
Server Output:



Administration:



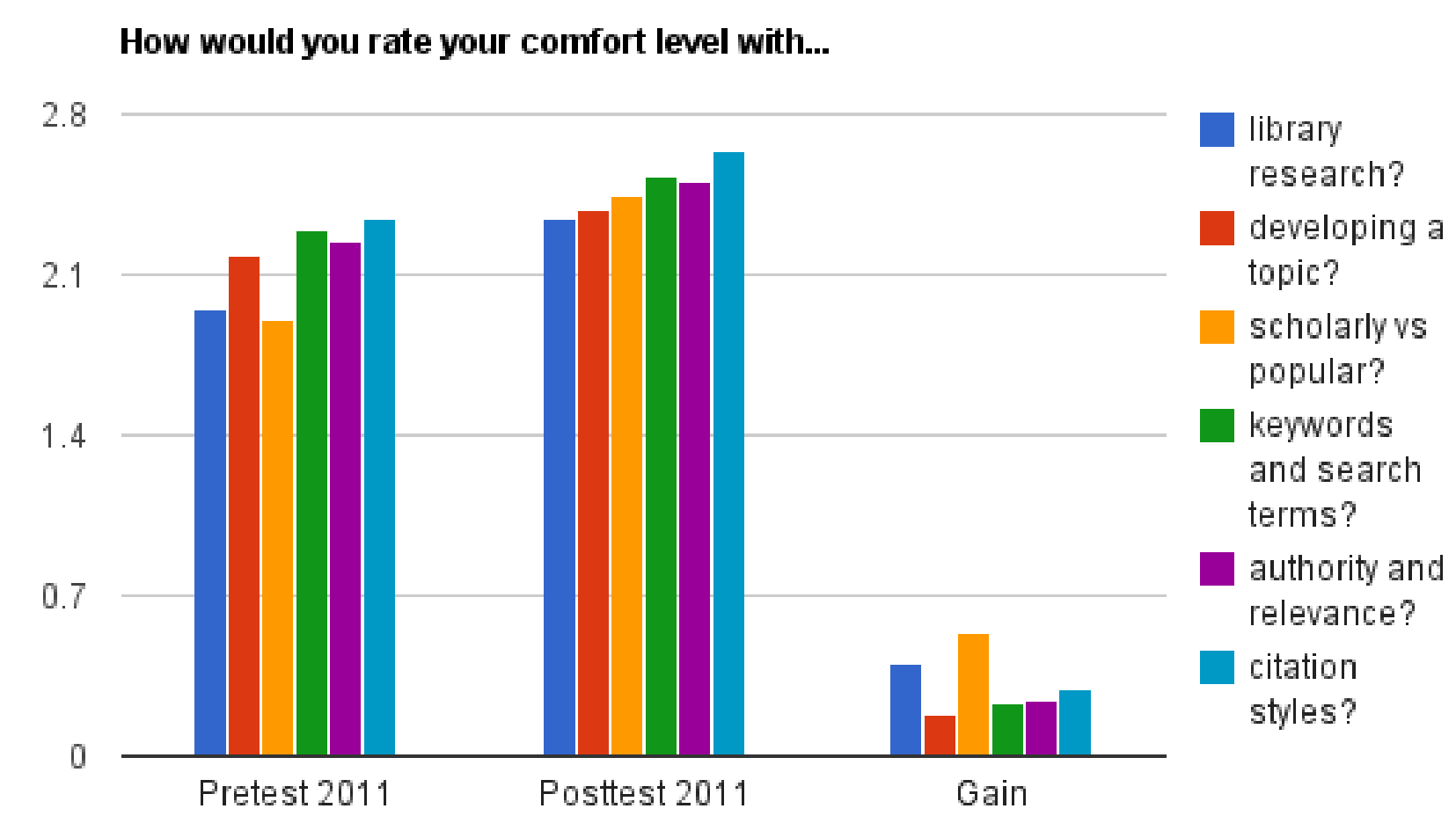
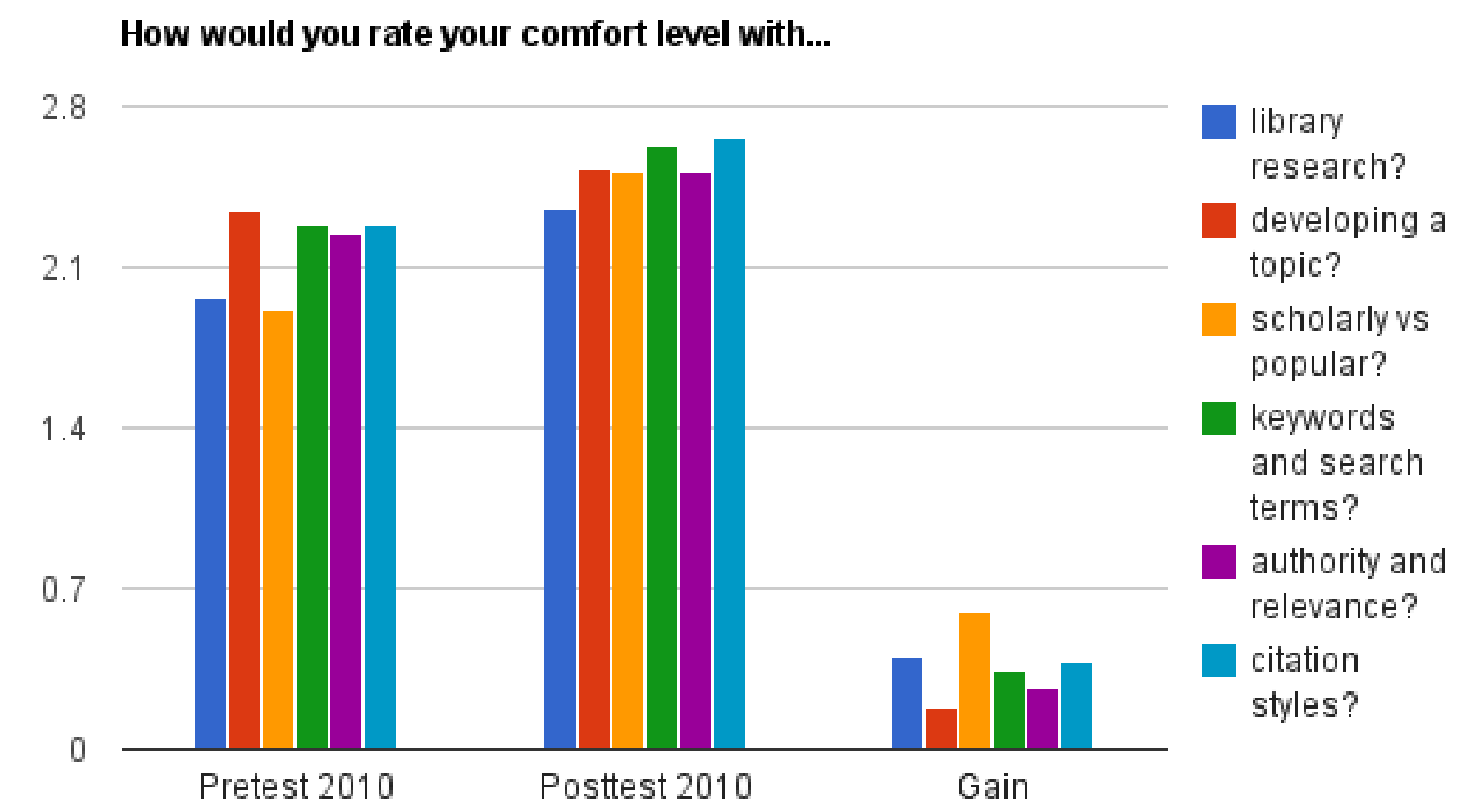
Student Workflow



The Self-Evaluation Rubric

	Beginning	Developing	Exemplary
One or more citations are...	<input type="radio"/> ...missing key elements and/or have multiple MLA formatting errors.	<input type="radio"/> ...nearly complete and/or has minor MLA formatting errors	<input type="radio"/> ...complete with no errors
Quality of Source: Author Credentials	<input type="radio"/> No acknowledgement of author credentials (or lack thereof) is provided.	<input type="radio"/> Author credentials and/or examples of previous work not relevant to content type and/or topic.	<input type="radio"/> Author credentials and/or examples of previous work ARE relevant to content type and/or topic.
Quality of Source: Intended Audience	<input type="radio"/> Sources' intended audiences not addressed.	<input type="radio"/> Sources' intended audiences not appropriate to content type OR is referenced in a superficial way (ie. "readers of the journal Anthropology in Action").	<input type="radio"/> Source's intended audiences are clearly addressed and appropriate to content type.
Evaluation	<input type="radio"/> Annotations fail to make any specific claims regarding the relevance of the work to the topic.	<input type="radio"/> Annotations include cursory or broad reasons for the articles' relevance to the topic.	<input type="radio"/> Annotations provide clear evidence of the articles' relevance to the topic.

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



Sample of Completed Work

Your Topic: "Role of women and their sexuality"

Last Update: 2011-08-17 18:08:33

Newspaper Article Citation:

Kehe, Marjorie. "Interview with Stephanie Staal, Author of 'Reading Women'" Christian Science Monitor. Christian Science Publishing Society, 25 Mar. 2011. Web. 17 Aug. 2011.

Newspaper Article Annotation:

Marjorie Kehe, the book editor for the Christian Science Monitor, is interviewing Stephanie Staal ("Reading Women") to help mothers find their own comfortable place if they are feeling out of place in their lives right now. Kehe includes excerpts about how "equality of the sexes was considered a given", which is still considered a given today. However, she later includes quotes from Staal that speak of the "incredible pressure" women face from society, such as the ideals of looking beautiful, being successful in work, and being a wonderful suburban mom. This shows that while female equality may be expected, it is not to be taken for granted. This article encourages women to find their own equilibrium, even if it requires breaking norms by leaving the suburbs or other changes to help a woman settle in as a mother.

General Interest Article Citation:

Armas, Henry. "Exploring Linkages Between Sexuality and Rights to Tackle Poverty." IDS Bulletin Oct. 2006: 21-26. EBSCO. Web. 17 Aug. 2011.

General Interest Article Annotation:

Henry Armas is an attorney who specializes in human rights, and he is writing here for interested human and women's rights advocates about the abuses made against women through the violation of their sexual rights. His main argument is for the inclusion of sexuality as an important factor in the rise in standing of a person, but especially a woman. He points out that female genital mutilation (FGM) is still practiced in many places throughout the world, and is used to subdue and force women into unfavorable and easily exploitable positions. Armas says these kinds of practices violate a woman's sexual and human rights, and along with the threat of AIDS and the emotional side-effects of these violations, female sexuality is equally as "real" as matters such as education and housing.

Scholarly Article Citation:

Trice-Black, Shannon, and Victoria A. Foster. "Sexuality of Women with Young Children: A Feminist Model of Mental Health Counseling." Journal of Mental Health Counseling 33.2 (2011): 95-111. Print.

Scholarly Article Annotation:

Trice-Black and Foster are writing regarding what they see as unreasonably high expectations regarding the role of women with young children, especially in their sexuality. They argue that the main image of new mothers is of "rebounding with sexual enthusiasm and sensuality", while in reality mothers are often affected by "fatigue [and] overwork" which is an isolating factor. The argument maintained throughout is that it is unfair to put such ubiquitously high expectations on women, as both "devoted primary caregivers" and as successful professionals. This topic is particularly important when dealing with women with young children because this demographic has been relatively ignored, and the media image and society's perception of them creates an atmosphere where women are pressured to "put on a persona", which stifles or negatively influences their own sexuality.

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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.