Searching for High Quality Information

Searching the Health Sciences Literature

The solution: Beginning fall 2007, students working toward a BS in Clinical Management and Leadership and management, and clinical research administration introduced via distance education platform.

New user group emerged: individuals with some or all of their undergraduate training completed who wished to enter or advance a health professions career

The Himmelfarb Health Sciences Library initially struggled to meet the needs of these non-traditional students and eventually devised a number of programs and services to support the research and educational needs of these students including:

- Education of distance education faculty on copyright, off-campus access options, and online resources was adapted from existing instructional material and an original introduction and review suggested answers

- Inclusion of multi-disciplinary databases such as ARL/Inform Complete on the Library’s home page to meet general education needs

- The extension of strictly health sciences resources to the main academic gateway to improve undergraduate exposure to these tools

- Responsibility for a 1-credit, online course. Foundations of Management Information Systems, which taught basic computer and information literacy skills (HSci106)

- Each student enters the SMHS distance education program with at least 60 credits completed, including 6 credits in English composition

- Should the University's writing requirements apply to them or should the program be adapted in some way to reflect their advanced status?

The Issue of Distance Education Students in the Health Sciences

Health Sciences distance education students posed a special problem as the University implemented its Writing Program:

- Each student enters the SMHS distance education program with at least 60 credits completed, including 6 credits in English composition

- Should the University's writing requirements apply to them or should the program be adapted in some way to reflect their advanced status?

The solution: Beginning fall 2007, students working toward a BS in Clinical Management and Leadership and Clinical Research Administration must also complete HSci112: Writing in the Health Sciences.

Leadership and Clinical Research Administration must also complete HSci 112: Writing in the Health Sciences.

The University Writing Program

To promote scholarship, critical thinking, and academic excellence among undergraduates, the University created a seven-credit, mandatory writing program for all students:

- Every freshman takes a 4-credit writing seminar focused on a theme, such as "Shakespeare and Love" or "Conspiracy: Theory", which includes three increasingly-complex writing assignments

- During Sophomore and Junior years, students are required to take two 3-credit writing-intensive courses within their respective disciplines

- Departments providing extensive support to the program include the Writing Center and the Gelman Library, the University's main undergraduate library

"The overall search process was an eye opening one. After having written hundreds of college papers the last several years I felt like I knew a fair amount about research. I realized however that I have many more resources available through the GW library sources than I would have otherwise. The e-texts are a nice addition with readily available summaries."

The End Result

A module that emphasized the research process and highlighted health sciences and multidisciplinary online resources was adapted from existing instructional material and an original introduction and assignment created as follows:

- Searching for High Quality Information which covered such topics as selecting the best information resource, searching beyond the web, the professional health sciences literature, MEDLINE, and evaluating information

- Searching the Health Sciences Literature which covered selecting a research topic, steps in the research process, selecting the appropriate resource for your information need, and citing sources

- The Focused Assignment required students to research obesity in adolescents in order to practice:

  - Locating background information on a topic

  - Identifying high quality and factual materials on the Web such as statistics, program information, and position papers

  - Locating professional level materials through a database search

  - Locating news and policy-driven sources in an interdisciplinary database

  - Critiquing their own and colleagues search strategies and results

  - Students could link directly to online books and journals and to additional tutorials from the easiest place to search, but it is not always the most accurate and for reliable science information I would not use this at all if possible…"

Overall, this process was somewhat frustrating. As our reading in the provided links state, sometimes it is difficult to find exactly what I am looking for. I was quite pleased to learn we have access to many different tools in our library and can go to one place to search many databases. I often look at the internet as the easiest place to search, but it is not always the most accurate and for reliable science information I would not use this at all if possible…"

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"This process gave me many more avenues to go down when conducting searches. I typically have simply used google and yahoo. The information helped me to realize the importance of considering the slants that may be placed on these sources. The text book information was the most solid to me. It was easy to understand and I felt that the information was good. I would use the textbooks and journals in the future. I have been most comfortable with internet searches, but now understand the other valuable tools available."