

Embedded Library Instruction in Undergraduate Research Classes: Facilitating Scholarly Conversation between Librarians, Faculty and Students

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Introduction

The George Mason University Libraries, working with the University's Students as Scholars program and the Office of Institutional Assessment, used our participation in the ALA Assessment in Action program to study the impact of systematically embedding librarians into research-intensive and scholarly inquiry classes during the 2013/2014 academic year (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2010). The purpose was to evaluate the impact on student learning that could occur from weaving librarian participation into course development, assignment creation and pre- and post-evaluation of student work. Librarians were partnered with faculty members in a variety of subject areas to test this approach.

Mason developed the *Students as Scholars* Quality Enhancement Plan in 2009 (Usher et al 2011), as a part of our decennial re-accreditation, with a goal of increasing student success in research and creative activities. To make these opportunities available to all students, faculty have been encouraged to create research-based courses that build disciplinary skills and provide authentic projects for students. The resulting assessment- conducted with support from the Office of Institutional Assessment- is increasingly important to understanding the impact of Mason's educational efforts.

Process

Before semester

- AiA/SaS team evaluate research course offerings, invite faculty and librarians to participate.
- Faculty and librarians met to design assignments and plan librarian interaction during semester.

During semester

- Librarians visit classes for introduction, administer survey.
- Faculty and librarians use survey to target information literacy instruction.
- Librarians respond to wiki prompts
- Librarians provide planned interaction with students.

- Students complete projects, contacting librarians as needed.
- Students complete end of semester survey.
- Faculty give librarians access to student work products.
- Librarians evaluate student work using rubric.

End of semester

- AiA/SaS teams receive email feedback from faculty and librarians.
- Faculty and librarians plan future collaboration.



Figure 1. A student in a history class evaluates a colonial text.

How well were the activities implemented? What were the supports and barriers?

All partnerships offered something positive for students, though some partnerships were much more active than others. Supports included promotion and relationship development through OSCAR staff, project coordination by the leadership team, and previous positive experiences between the academic department and the Libraries (e.g. History and Art History). Barriers included schedules and location of faculty, if not often on campus. Some partnerships did not have adequate communication of expectations and resources. These can be improved by sustained partnerships over time; as individuals spend more time together, they develop trust and improved communication.

Who participated?

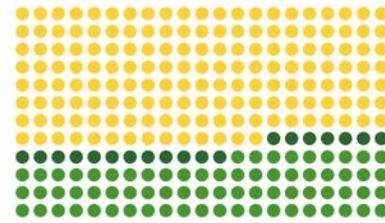


Figure 2. 299 students enrolled in enhanced classes. Of these, 109 responded to the AiA/SaS survey at the end of the semester. 86 of these reporting meeting with a librarian.

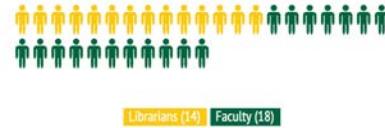


Figure 3. AiA/SaS pilot involved a diverse set of faculty and librarians.

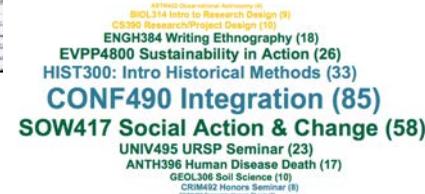


Figure 4. Over the fall 2013 and spring 2014 semester, 19 sections of courses participated in the AiA/SaS program. Yellow courses were taught during the fall semester, blue spanned both semesters, and classes labeled in green occurred during the spring semester. The size of the name corresponds with the number of students enrolled. Courses were offered in twelve different departments.

What did students learn?

Student Learning Outcomes	Level of Competency			
	1 Beginner	2 Intermediate	3 Emerging	4 Novice
Acquire information using effective searching strategies and the most appropriate information sources	Acquire information using a variety of strategies and use available information sources	Acquire information using a variety of strategies and use available information sources	Acquire information using a variety of strategies and use available information sources	Acquire information using a variety of strategies and use available information sources
Retrieve information about primary scholarship from credible sources that provide and enable comprehension analysis and synthesis	Retrieve information about primary scholarship from credible sources that provide and enable comprehension analysis and synthesis	Retrieve information about primary scholarship from credible and diverse sources that use and provide or support analysis	Retrieve information about primary scholarship from credible and diverse sources that use and provide or support analysis	Retrieve information that links relevance and quality
Effectively refine inquiry in response to evidence	Demonstrate ability to refine inquiry in response to evidence	Demonstrate limited ability to refine inquiry in response to evidence	Demonstrate limited ability to refine inquiry in response to evidence	Demonstrate no ability to refine inquiry

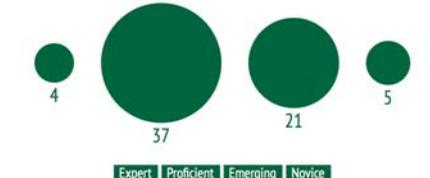


Figure 5. Librarians were asked to evaluate student work samples from their classes based on targeted *Students as Scholars* rubric.

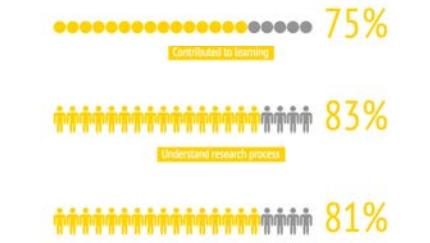


Figure 6. Student responses on the overall research course survey about how much the course contributed to their learning.

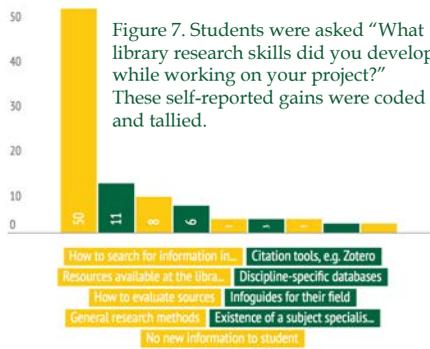
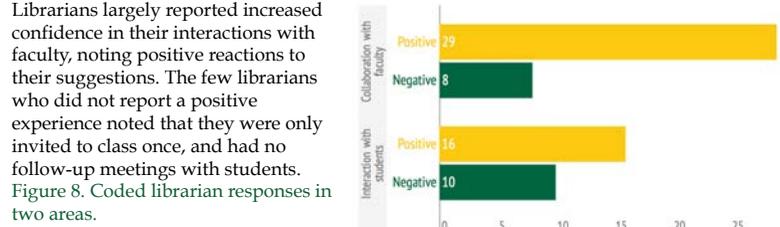


Figure 7. Students were asked "What library research skills did you develop while working on your project?" These self-reported gains were coded and tallied.

Does the project have adequate resources to be effective? Did students and faculty use the resources available to them through this project?

Results are mixed. For the partnerships in which librarians and faculty worked together closely, students and faculty were more likely to use Library resources (books, reference materials, InfoGuides, technical guides, appropriate databases, etc.). Other partnerships were not traditional, in that the courses were field-based or featured projects that did not seem to require library research.

Do librarians feel more confident in their ability to collaborate with faculty on teaching research skills to undergraduates? Do librarians report an improved ability to assess their own effectiveness in collaborative efforts?



How might the project be improved?

Overall, the partnerships in which faculty and librarians worked together in a collaborative and sustained way produced the best results for students, faculty, and librarians. The project has demonstrated success for this first year, and with continued support and growth in partnership with OSCAR, the long-term impact seems sustainable. Much of this model will be helpful in the future to create better collaborations between faculty and librarians in teaching. We will continue the following:

- Pairing librarians with faculty teaching OSCAR research courses.
- Using the initial survey to assess the information literacy skills of the students within the context of the assignments. Encouraging collaboration between faculty and librarians on assignments.
- Librarians having access to, and assessing, student final products.

Acknowledgments

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