

Making the Connection: Distant Students and Library Instruction

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The Problem

Distance education students at the University of Montana-Missoula were missing out on a resource that 9000 on-campus students receive annually—library research instruction.

The Solution

In order to correct this deficit and connect distant students to the wealth of academic resources available online at the Mansfield Library, we developed an information literacy program for students at a distance. The first part of this program was offering a one-credit, online course.

Development

Due to the strong preference for an independent library skills class evinced in our faculty survey conducted in December 2004, we received a course development grant from our department of Continuing Education in January 2005 to develop one.

The course drew on a few pre-existing items:

- The Texas Information Literacy Tutorial (TILT) (<http://tilt.lib.utsystem.edu>)
- Our online tutorial (<http://www.lib.umd.edu/dept/hum/WebModules/mainpage.html>)
- Univ. of Washington's Research 101 (<http://www.lib.washington.edu/uwill/research101>)
- William Badke's Research Strategies

LIB295 Research Strategies, an online course received via the Blackboard course management system, was first offered in Spring 2005 to three students. It has been offered every semester since.

Data Collected

In addition to the normal grade/performance data gathered during a credit class, we included a pre- and post-test each semester measuring students' comfort with the library, knowledge of library terms, familiarity with software and applications, and computer literacy. This proved useful to the further development of the course as well as interesting to the library and university as a whole. See the back of this handout for some examples of what we discovered.

Further Avenues

We are working to recruit more students to take the class. We are also investigating others' courses with an eye toward discovering new ideas to adapt, perhaps leading to some sort of TILT type class for distant students. We are also continuing work on expanding our instructional offerings to distant students, and the next phase is a Blackboard-based tutorial that can be incorporated into other credit classes.

More on Data Collected

As mentioned previously, the pre- and post-tests associated with this class have yielded rich and interesting data on the small population that has taken the class. These are representative items; please contact the author of the poster for more details and data.

- As of this summer, only 14 students have taken the class across three semesters. Boosting enrollment in the class is one of our biggest goals.
- Student rank ranged from Freshman to Graduate Student. We also had a number of students who were unaffiliated with the University.
- Most of the students considered their information literacy skills to be "self-taught." A small number of them had received library instruction in high school. None of the students in the class had received information literacy instruction at the college level.
- Most of the students considered themselves computer literate, although there was a significant minority that did not.
- Students felt highly comfortable with the internet and email, somewhat comfortable with web search engines, and least comfortable with instant messaging, library catalogs and library databases.
- The post-test evaluated gains in knowledge in use of the library catalog, library databases, search strategy and choice of resources. Students generally improved in these categories from pre-test to post-test.

For Further Information

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Thanks for stopping by!