From “Author” to “Authority”: teaching evaluation by concepts of citation

Felicia Palsson
Sonoma State University
Rohnert Park, CA
Sonoma State University

• Public, liberal arts school in Northern California
• Founded 1960
• 8,000 students, 86% undergraduate
• 45 Bachelor’s degrees offered, 16 Master’s
Freshman Composition

Two levels: ENG 100AB (stretch), ENG 101

Variety of instructors:
– Occasional tenured faculty
– Mostly graduate students in English (TAs)
– Several adjunct faculty
The Problem(s)

• Challenges for writing instructors
  class size, underprepared students, reading comprehension issues

• GE SLOs are a mouthful
  Information Literacy SLO wedged in there in freshman comp

• Students’ research papers not producing evidence of learning in Information Literacy (IL)
  No engagement with sources in the research paper assignment
Area A2: Fundamentals of Communication

1. Critically read, analyze, and evaluate a variety of non-fiction and academic texts from a variety of disciplines, focusing on rhetorical strategies and an understanding of audience, purpose, and context.

2. Write well-developed, well-organized texts in multiple genres and media, including thesis-driven arguments; address an audience appropriately and use a variety of rhetorical effects to enhance cogency and clarity.

3. Develop research skills: find, select, analyze, and evaluate outside sources; integrate the ideas of others into texts that express the writer’s own position. Understand the ethical uses of sources of all types, and use appropriate documentation format in writing and in multimedia presentations.

4. Employ a variety of sentence structures and organizational patterns to illustrate clearly the logic of ideas. Revise and edit written assignments, demonstrating a command of syntax, appropriate diction, and the mechanics of Standard English.

5. Practice presenting persuasive oral arguments; develop active listening skills in order to interpret, evaluate, and engage critically with new ideas.
The Solutions(?)

- Challenges for writing instructors:
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- Students' research papers not producing evidence of learning in Information Literacy (IL):
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- Increase Collaboration: Library take a bigger role
- Library take over the Information Literacy assessment

- Isolate the Information Literacy SLO
- Create a common assignment: annotated bibliography
- Focus on critical thinking & evaluation of sources
- Forget about doing a research paper (keep writing tasks separate from IL tasks)
Pilot: Spring 2012

3-step collaboration with Library

1) Students take a pre-test of IL skills
2) Library instruction in evaluation of sources
3) Assessment of annotated bibliographies
## The Collaboration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freshman Composition</th>
<th>% buy-in at pre-test</th>
<th>% buy-in through annotated bib</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22 instructors total</td>
<td>64% (14)*</td>
<td>27% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 sections</td>
<td>47% (17)</td>
<td>22% (8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Freshman Comp Instructors</th>
<th>Graduate Students (TAs)</th>
<th>Part-Time/Adjunct Faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>22 total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of buy-in (pre-test)</td>
<td>88% (7)</td>
<td>50% (7)</td>
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Instruction on Evaluating Sources

What’s the big idea?

Author ➔ Authority

Expand the idea of “citing sources,” using the annotated bibliography to engage in critical evaluation of sources.

– Use the elements of a citation one-by-one as an approach to evaluation.

Begin building the annotated bibliography in class.
Abstract: In recent campaigns, candidates have sought to attract votes from the growing Latino electorate through ethnic cues. This article examines the role that ethnic cues play in shaping the political opinions and choices of Latinos (Anglos). We take up the simplest of group cues, the ethnicity of the candidate. We argue that candidate ethnicity provides evidence for an experiment that manipulated exposure to candidate ethnicity information and resistance to Latino candidates among Anglos. [ABSTRACT FROM AUTHOR]
Activity: Evaluating Information Sources

Step 1: Learn to read an article citation (this example is in MLA style):


Step 2: Learn to evaluate information sources critically:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authority</th>
<th>Try it: Article from Library Database</th>
<th>Try it: Website found on Google</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who is the author of the information?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are his/her credentials?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source/Publication</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where was this published? How was the information distributed?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content and Purpose</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why was this information written? To inform you? Sell you something?</td>
<td></td>
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The Assessment

- Methodology flaws with pre-test (timing, wording of questions)
- Annotated bibliographies not consistent
  - Unable to compare
  - Unable to score
Pre-Test of IL skills

Overall scores by category

Total = 396 responses
(132 participants)

- Identification of Bibliographic Information:
  - 3 or better: 48.5%
  - 2: 47.5%
  - 1: 4%

- Understanding Purpose, Audience and Bias:
  - 3 or better: 48.2%
  - 2: 39.4%
  - 1: 12.4%

- Relevance to Research:
  - 3 or better: 42.9%
  - 2: 30.1%
  - 1: 26.8%
Annotated Bibliographies

• About 40% of the annotated bibliographies were demonstrably geared toward IL assessment
• Many of them ignored the IL criteria altogether
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Going Forward

Collaboration momentum
- Keep the common assignment
- Keep the SLO for IL isolated
- Library take an even more pro-active role!

Workshop the annotated bib assignment
Re-design the assessment process