Using Library Programming to Improve Student Success

One of the challenges that students face when they need to access information is the differing and evolving format of available materials. As the availability of electronic databases and e-books continues to rise, there is an increasing need for students to learn how to use these mediums efficiently and effectively. While electronic books and databases are normally vetted for accuracy, internet websites demand a high level of critical analysis to validate their authenticity, a fact that students do not always recognize.

Although most college libraries have updated their methods of instruction, many students do not understand the research process and, consequently, are intimidated by the resource delivery methods. Through timely and relevant instructional sessions, workshops, and assignments throughout the semester, librarians and professors can help students improve their evaluation and critical analysis skills.

To facilitate this concept, our library staff developed a "Research and Writing Series" that runs in conjunction with various essay and research paper assignments in the college's composition classes. The library staff presents a series of workshops specific to students' needs as they are writing a research paper, while a peer tutor from Student Support presents a series of workshops designed to help students avoid common writing errors. These workshops are scheduled at various times throughout the semester and are limited to one skill per session so students can fully absorb the content. Single skill sessions also allow students to select the workshops that will be most helpful to them based on their individual skill set.

The Research Series

The Research Series consists of several workshops:

How to Find and Use E-Books. Students are shown how to do title, author, subject, and keyword searches to create a list of e-books available from the library's catalog or online databases.

Finding Articles and Other Sources for Your Term Paper. In this instructional session, students are shown how to perform a search of a multidisciplinary database. This task teaches students how to find scholarly, peer-reviewed articles that are more credible than information they might find searching the internet.

Finding Literary Criticisms. This session is specific to our Composition II and sophomore literature courses. Students are taught how to search the literary criticism databases for articles and content on specific works of literature.

Evaluating and Using Internet Sources. Students use handouts with points to consider when evaluating the authority, accuracy, objectivity, currency, scope, and design of websites. After being shown several credible websites, we discuss their purpose and other identifying attributes such as authors, sponsors, and possible bias.

Plagiarism and Using Databases to Help Construct Your Works Cited Page. Two sessions are devoted to plagiarism and the creation of the reference list or works cited page. Although students understand why they should not plagiarize, they do not always understand how to avoid it.

The "Grammar Jammers"

The writing skill component of the program includes nine workshops covering the grammar skills that often cause students to lose points on essays:

- Using subjects and verbs correctly to avoid sentence fragments
- Avoiding run-on sentences
- Using and misusing verbs
- Subject/verb agreement
- Consistent verb tense
- When and how to use pronouns, adjectives, and adverbs
- Apostrophes and commonly confused words
- Applying comma rules
- Using sentence variety within paragraphs and essays

Wrapping It All Up

Two weeks before most research papers are due, we hold a research and writing clinic in the library. Library staff, faculty members, and peer tutors are available for four hours one evening to confer with students about their research papers. Faculty members and peer tutors help students improve their writing, while library staff members help the students gather research articles, books, and other sources.

One result of our current technology-rich era is the ability to quickly access the most desired content. In my dual role as a librarian and a composition faculty member, I have seen many students grab the first two or three articles listed on a search in order to be in and out of the library in 10 minutes or less. Part of the information instruction process is to explain to students that good research takes time. Settling for the first articles listed on a search return will often deny them some of the more useful sources, as well as cause them additional work in the long run.

We have received excellent feedback from students who have attended the workshops and the writing clinic. Faculty members appreciate the supplemental instruction offered through the Research Series and the Grammar Jammers. They happily volunteer for the research and writing clinic, and many have asked library staff to present research workshops to their individual classes.

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