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A Collaborative Approach to Information Literacy: First-year Composition, Writing Center, and Library Partnerships at West Virginia University

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Abstract: Writing faculty, tutors, and librarians at West Virginia University took a team-approach to teaching research, reading, and writing as intertwined processes. This collaborative project encouraged each member of the team to re-examine professional and disciplinary boundaries, and resulted in new assignments and activities that successfully engage students in researched writing.

First-year composition is foundational in that it helps students hone their critical writing and research abilities. However, when we teach composition courses, we seem to teach research as a separate skill. In “Locating the Center: Libraries, Writing Centers and Information Literacy,” University of Iowa librarian James Elmborg draws attention to the ways that information literacy fits into the general education of college students and argues that the teaching of writing and the teaching of research should be described and taught as one literacy practice. Members of the writing faculty, tutoring center, and the library at West Virginia University, a large public university, agree with Elmborg and have begun to put his ideas into practice by taking a team-approach to teaching research, reading, and writing as intertwined processes. This collaborative project forced each member of the team to re-examine professional and disciplinary boundaries. By focusing on the connections between and across disciplines (rather than divisions), the project demonstrated that writing teachers, tutors, and librarians could foster new literacies through innovative inquiry and collaboration.

Theory Informing the Program: Defining Information Literacy

At the outset of the project we knew that “information literacy” could be a difficult concept to define. A recent article in the Chronicle of Higher Education traces the term “information literacy” to 1989 “when the American Library Association called it a necessary skill and urged schools and colleges to integrate it into their curricula” (Foster A39). That narrow skills-based definition, however, has been challenged.

Stanley Wilder, associate dean of the River Campus libraries at the University of Rochester, contends that “information literacy remains the wrong solution to the wrong problem” (B13)—and his contention centers on a concern that “information literacy” can too easily focus on skill sets and protocols rather than strategies for engaging with reading and writing and thinking. He does not see students having to scale mountains of new information. In fact, Wilder says that we need to make a conscious effort to characterize students as more than “information seekers”; he suggests that we cast them as “apprentices engaged in a continuous cycle of reading and writing” (Dow, qtd. by Wilder B13).

As writing teachers and librarians who are collaboratively engaged in teaching research, reading, and writing as intertwined processes, we agree with Wilder’s emphasis on a cycle rather than a skill set. We also think he is right to question what we collectively and professionally mean by “information literacy” and what is at stake as we continue to circulate that term.

For our collaboration, we started with the definition of information literacy offered in The American Library Association’s Presidential Committee on Information Literacy: Final Report. The ALA report defines information literacy as a person’s ability “to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and
use effectively the needed information.” The Association of College and Research Libraries’ Competency Standards for Higher Education elaborates on this basic definition by emphasizing the way individuals use information within the specific context of the collegiate environment. According to the ACRL standards, “[a]n information literate individual” is able to do the following six things:

1. Determine the extent of information needed
2. Access the needed information effectively and efficiently
3. Evaluate information and its sources critically
4. Incorporate selected information into one’s knowledge base
5. Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
6. Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally.

Our collaboration has taught us that composition instructors play a key role in fostering students’ information literacy processes. The act of writing requires students to determine what information they need to support their theses, how to organize that information, and how to present it in such a way as to be relevant to their audience. In other words, the processes of researching and writing are recursive, each one mutually informing the other.

**Review of Literature on Information Literacy**

In a 2004 article in the *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, librarian Barbara D’Angelo and composition scholar Barry M. Maid describe “a natural partnership” between the libraries and writing programs (212). Such partnerships, they argue, can be an effective means of implementing information literacy across the curriculum. As we reviewed the existing scholarship on information literacy, we were thus a bit surprised to find little on the topic in the main composition and rhetoric journals. Just as D’Angelo and Maid’s essay was published in the *Journal of Academic Librarianship*, university librarians and the professional publications in their field continue to take the lead on information literacy instruction, curriculum development, outreach, assessment, planning, and professional development for both teaching librarians and other faculty members.

In developing our program, we turned to several library publications that address the information seeking behavior of college students, the role of information literacy in rhetoric and composition instruction, and collaborations between faculty and librarians.

Among the more visible works on information literacy collaborations between writing faculty and librarians is the collection of essays edited by James K. Elmborg and Sheril Hook: *Centers for Learning: Writing Centers and Libraries in Collaboration* (2005). As the title suggests, this collection gathers a wide range of case examples that show how writing centers and libraries can support students as they learn to find, evaluate, and integrate a wide range of information from various sources. The cases show how librarians and writing center tutors (individually and collectively) can guide students as they navigate information and come to understand what they do and do not know. The strategies outlined in the cases range from shared principles (Elmborg) and shared practices (Hook), to specific archive projects (Gannett et al) and examples of research and writing “clinics” (Boff and Toth). Only one chapter, however, explicitly goes beyond the library and writing center to include the classroom as a space for collaboration among faculty, students, tutors, and librarians (White and Pobywajlo).

Wendy Holliday and Britt Fagerheim, librarians at Utah State University, outline the process of collaboration between writing faculty and librarians in “Integrating Information Literacy with a Sequenced English Composition Curriculum” (2006). Their process starts with the assumption that information literacy instruction works most effectively when integrated into a course, and that writing courses that focus on research and argument lend themselves particularly well to this integration because faculty and librarians share similar goals. Holliday and Fagerheim describe their initial assessment of student, faculty, and librarian needs and how they used common themes and priorities to develop carefully sequenced instruction around specific student-learning objectives. Because the librarians recognized that the English instructors took varied approaches, they created several “core” and “supplementary” learning activities that were organized around goals and objectives rather than trying to develop activities that corresponded to specific assignments (179-80). This goal-centered, course-integrated approach to information literacy suggests a model that can be adapted to a wide range of programs and disciplines.

In general, the literature on information literacy instruction emphasizes the need for a dynamic and flexible model that goes well beyond print-based bibliographic instruction. As John Perry Barlow, the co-founder of Electronic Frontier Foundation, explains, “Cyberspace is gradually teaching us that information is a verb, not a noun” (Albanese 44). Librarian Troy Swanson extends this idea in his essay, “A Radical Step: Implementing a Critical Information Literacy Model.” Swanson encourages instructors—both content faculty and librarians—to make information literacy skills
Edward K. Owusu-Ansah, a reference librarian and coordinator of information literacy and library instruction, provides two excellent reviews of existing library scholarship. In his 2004 essay, "Information Literacy and Higher Education: Placing the Academic Library in the Center of a Comprehensive Solution," Owusu-Ansah examines the relationship between librarians and faculty as he addresses the question of "what role the academic library should play in achieving information literacy on campus" (3). The essay takes for granted the need for information literacy and the American Library Association's definition of the concept and, instead, focuses attention on the debate over the effectiveness of who should teach information literacy: subject-area faculty members or academic librarians? It can be a tense issue on campuses if librarians are seen primarily in support roles rather than as faculty members credentialed to teach their own subject. Owusu-Ansah proposes a comprehensive solution that consists of course-integrated components in combination with an independent credit course in information literacy taught by librarians. He notes that this phased solution builds on existing faculty-librarian collaborations and creates strong alliances across campus (10-11). Owusu-Ansah extends his argument in the 2007 essay "Beyond Collaboration: Seeking Greater Scope and Centrality for Library Instruction." In this second essay, Owusu-Ansah traces the success of and support for cross-campus collaborations that integrate information literacy into discipline-specific courses and contexts but renews his argument for credit-bearing library courses if the library is to take on a central role in education.

For the purposes of the collaboration among librarians, composition teachers, and tutors that we undertook, we end this review of literature with Rolf Norgaard’s essay, “Writing Information Literacy in the Classroom.” Norgaard is a faculty member in the Program for Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Colorado at Boulder. In his contribution as a “guest columnist” for the Spring 2004 issue of Reference and User Services Quarterly, he notes that his title is meant to be provocative. He explains that he deliberately avoided the title, “Writing and Information Literacy” because he thinks that “both fields might benefit in important ways from eliding that ‘and.’ Each can and should ‘write’ the other” if we want to achieve “situated, process-oriented, and relevant literacy” and writing that stays connected to a rich civic, rhetorical tradition (225, 226). We can confirm the value of collectively writing information literacy based on the results of our collaboration among writing teachers, librarians, and tutors.

The Collaborative Context: Information Literacy within a Required Writing Course

Since our review of literature revealed that librarians have taken the lead on information literacy scholarship over the past decade, it was not surprising that the librarians on our campus initiated our local conversations. In late spring of 2006, the head of the Reference Department approached the director of the writing program to ask how we might together develop a significant information literacy component for the second course in a two-course required writing sequence that focuses on research and argument. Both sides were eager for the collaboration. The composition instructors wished for ways to convince students that writing and researching each build upon the other, and the librarians believed that the best way to put information literacy into practice would be to integrate it into campus programs and student work. As a result, English faculty, writing tutors, and university librarians on our campus have worked together to scaffold assignments, activities, and responses that help students understand and value writing and research as intertwined processes.

To launch this information literacy collaboration, however, we decided that a 75-section course taught to 1,500 students each semester by more than 30 different teachers was simply too large if we wanted to try new approaches across all sections, seek feedback from all those involved (students, tutors, teachers, and librarians), and then revise and seek more feedback. Instead, we turned to a new accelerated academic writing course that had recently been designed to help already-strong writers satisfy the University’s two-course sequence in one writing requirement. The new course had the advantage of a smaller scale: eight sections a semester for a total of no more than 160 students, taught by a small group of four teachers who were committed to working together, meeting regularly, and developing a new curricula. It was the ideal size for students, tutors, teachers, and librarians to collaborate on information literacy.

Beyond offering a manageable size for our project, this accelerated writing course shares goals that are similar to the
75-section research and argument class—an important feature if our project proved successful as a model for other writing courses. All of our required writing courses draw on the WPA Outcomes of rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, reading, and writing; processes; and knowledge of conventions. We translate (and reorganize) the WPA Outcomes just slightly to make the goals a bit more transparent to students:

- Goal 1: Understand Writing as a Process
- Goal 2: Argue Effectively and Persuasively in a Variety of Contexts
- Goal 3: Explore and Evaluate Ideas
- Goal 4: Integrate Research Effectively
- Goal 5: Know the Rules

To meet these five goals, students in our writing courses (probably like students in many composition courses) develop a portfolio of writing that consists of four major papers, informal writing done in and outside of class, and reflective writing. For the accelerated course, the four essays include:

1. a narrative based on personal experience;
2. a rhetorical analysis based on two texts;
3. a critical interpretation;
4. and a researched analysis on a topic of their choice.

The first three essays ask students to think, read, and write about some aspect of their lives and some texts that matter to them. The last essay asks them to think, read, and write about a larger issue while actively engaging with the ideas of others. All but the first essay requires some sort of outside source; each subsequent essay poses new rhetorical challenges and research questions.

Prior to the accelerated writing course, no formal partnership existed between the composition program and the library. In past semesters, individual instructors contacted librarians and requested their assistance in teaching students about available resources. They sought librarian expertise at the end of the semester when students were doing more extensive research for their final papers. This informal arrangement limited the instructors' and students' concept of information literacy to locating information. Evaluating and integrating sources were taught as separate concepts.

**Librarians as Collaborators**

In the pilot course (English 103), students start incorporating outside information by the time they are writing the second of four essays for the semester. The first information literacy session in the library thus focused on quick methods to get information; the emphasis was not so much on how to retrieve information, but how to evaluate the information. The teaching librarians showed students a few tricks for searching Google—such as restricting searches by using phrases and required terms. They also demonstrated how to find government documents on the web using Google's advanced search. A discussion of Wikipedia was also included in this session. To illustrate the way that anyone can edit Wikipedia, for instance, one librarian showed a clip of *The Colbert Report* which discussed the Word of the Day: "Wikiality." To illustrate the concept of "wikiality," Colbert explained, "I'm no fan of reality, and I'm no fan of encyclopedias. I've said it before: Who is Britannica to tell me George Washington had slaves? If I want to say George Washington didn’t have slaves, that’s my right. And now, thanks to Wikipedia, it’s also a fact." Colbert typed in some of his own entries to Wikipedia to alter reality and encouraged others to log on and do the same. The example let the students see how fluid online information could be and why it’s important to think critically about what’s considered a "real" or "wikial" source. The librarians concluded the information literacy session by discussing how to evaluate information on the web and how to use Network Solutions to find the owner of a site.

To assess how well students grasped the session’s concepts, and also to help them gather needed sources, the sessions taught by the librarians initially required two Research Logs: Research Log 1 required an evaluation of a website and an article on Wikipedia. Research Log 2 asked them to develop a focused research question. Eventually, students were required to complete a total of four Research Logs. All four comprised a total of 10% of each student’s final grade.

Before each of the library sessions, the 103 instructors introduced their students to the essay assignments. The rhetorical analysis (and by fall 2008, the persuasive essay) required limited external research. Students had several days to prepare for the session and bring a focused topic or several potential research questions. Both the instructors and the librarians stressed the importance of the library session in locating and evaluating potential sources early in the writing process. The second library session was held during week 8, immediately after instructors introduced the third essay. Students were given about a week to complete the Research Logs and submit them to their instructors to
The librarians who taught the sessions also asked to evaluate these logs. By participating as respondents to student writing, the librarians could see for themselves whether or not their sessions were effective (and then fine tune them for future students). The process of responding to student writing also reinforces the collaborative aspect of the course because it keeps the librarians in conversation with the writing teachers and, from the students’ perspective, it underscores the authority and voice that the librarians have as part of the instructional team.

The students’ research logs provided some key insights. For instance, some students found a disconnect between the library segment and their writing course; they didn’t understand why they had to do two distinct assignments asking them to focus their research topic. Some found the Research Log questions asking them to evaluate websites and articles on Wikipedia “tedious” and “redundant.” Other students were offended thinking that we were spending a class period teaching them how to search Google. Students also expressed a desire for handouts so they could replicate certain searches using Network Solutions.

Overall, however, the library sessions received positive responses. After each information literacy session, students were asked to complete a survey via Zoomerang, an online survey tool. Here’s what we found in the first semester of the pilot (Fall, 2006):

- 78% said the information presented in the information literacy session was the right amount.
- 94% said they clearly understood the benefits and risks of doing research on the Internet.
- 73% said they gained a better understanding of strategies for evaluating websites.
- 63% also said they now understood how to find a focus for their research.

After comparing the surveys to the students’ research logs, the librarians decided to make some changes to the Research Log assignments for the spring semester, 2007. The first revised information literacy session condensed the Google searching tips and added Lexis-Nexis; this database is a good choice for getting quick information as it is full-text and is easy to use. The revisions also changed wording in the lesson plan so the session focused more on evaluating web sources and less on searching skills. (For example, constructing searches in Google were presented as “quick tips.”) Google’s Advanced Search was shown as an easy way to find government documents on the Web. Librarians discussed evaluation of web sources as a necessary strategy that college students should develop.

As for Research Log assignments, the librarians combined Logs 1 and 2 by spring of 2007 and then designed new activities for two more sessions. The logs are now integrated more fully into student prewriting for their researched essays. The revised activities also streamline the website evaluation section and include a new question that asks students to find a newspaper article in Lexis-Nexis and evaluate its usefulness for their essay. In addition, the librarians now pass out handouts at the beginning of the research sessions to emphasize points during that class period and to provide a guide that students can use later in their own work outside of class. This handout includes the grading rubric for the revised first Research Log. In all, the course now has three Research Logs that have each been fine-tuned over four semesters in response to student comments and to support the key assignments in the course. The librarians focus the current research activities as follows:

- Research Log 1: Evaluating Internet Resources/Using Lexis-Nexis
- Research Log 2: Finding Books
- Research Log 3: Finding Articles

In the Appendix, we have included copies of all three research log activities (as well as the rubrics that the librarians created for each). These materials are available online to our students and instructors. When the librarians who designed, taught, and evaluated the three research activities were surveyed at the end of the two-year pilot, all observed that the amount of information presented in each of the library sessions seems appropriate and that the pilot had helped them establish a model that should work well for other students in the larger research and argument class.

Writing Centers as Collaborators

Writing centers have often been perceived as spaces for remediation and/or grammar fix-it-shops. The information literacy pilot project provided an opportunity to alter these historical perceptions of writing center work by adding another layer to the collaboration. The students in the pilot course, Accelerated Academic Writing, were already strong writers. When strong students such as these are encouraged to use the writing center, we shift the emphasis away from remediation and grammar correction and instead emphasize that all writers—regardless of their writing proficiency—need good readers and responders.
The pilot also presented an opportunity for meaningful collaboration. Writing centers are often characterized as supplemental to writing instruction: Places designed to serve or back-up writing intensive courses. In practice, however, writing centers play a significant role in college writing as one of the few places where writing instruction happens beyond first-year composition. Centers are much more than adjuncts to the curriculum. Certainly, they support writing-intensive courses, but more than importantly, they are partners in writing instruction.

The information literacy pilot emphasized the writing center’s partner role. The writing center coordinator and a graduate student tutor both attended curriculum and development meetings, offered input on the information literacy component as writing center professionals, and revised the model assignments to reflect the expertise they provided as both teachers and tutors.

In this important partnership, our University made a conscious choice to follow the model of other campus-integrated tutoring spaces like the Stanford Writing Center, whose aim is to influence the campus culture of writing. The Stanford Center is significantly involved in first-year composition and general education courses. The center is recognized as a place where university instructors and professors can learn how to teach writing effectively. Because of the center’s involvement at multiple levels, it plays a role in how students envision writing. According to Stanford’s five-year longitudinal study of writing, students at the end of their undergraduate careers did not see writing as simply a means of recording ideas but rather “as a way of managing and making sense of enormous amounts of information and as a way of creating new knowledge” (Stanford Study of Writing). Because the Stanford Writing Center is instrumental to university-wide writing instruction, it played a sizable role in shaping the students’ conceptions.

The English 103 Information Literacy pilot is one way through which our local writing center has had a hand in helping students re-envision writing and research.

Before the semester began, three tutors were trained in information literacy. The librarians introduced these tutors to databases and search engines and offered the tutors advice on how to help students discover appropriate sources. In the first few weeks of the semester, tutors visited and promoted the center in each pilot section of English 103. No student was required to visit the center, but during the tutors’ class visits, they emphasized how they could help students with their writing and research processes. Thereafter, each time an instructor introduced a new assignment or collected a draft, she would remind students of the writing center services. The students who took advantage of the center responded positively. For example, in an end-of-the-semester assessment of the course, one English 103 student spoke about what it means to construct an argument for a real audience and what it means to locate, evaluate, and incorporate information.

[My fourth essay] was an argumentative paper about whether we should drill for oil in national preserves. After I researched both sides of the issue, I decided that “drilling in national preserves should not be allowed because the short-lived economic benefits do not outweigh the permanent environmental damage.” This paper evolved from a peer-reviewed introduction to a nine page essay, mostly with the help of the Writing Center. At the Center, they advised me to include more of the opposing point of view, rather than just dismissing their points, which was a good idea.

In the Fall 2006 semester, the center saw about 16 of the 120 students enrolled in English 103 students. About half of the students asked for help with their persuasive research papers, and about a third asked for help with their portfolios. The total number of English 103 students who visited the Writing Center represents just over 10% of the total course population. These averages are consistent with the percentage of first year writing students (those students who take English 101 and 102) who use the writing center each semester and are also consistent with writing center usage on a national average (Writing Center Research Project).

The Writing Center continues to be part of the ongoing collaboration with the librarians and the writing teachers. By the end of the first pilot year (Spring 2007), one of the reference librarians teamed up with the Writing Center coordinator to implement a Writing and Research Clinic—an idea borrowed from the Bowling Green Writing Center. The Writing and Research Clinic combined two existing WVU services, the Writing Center and the Term Paper Clinic. Students who have questions about how to find resources and how to integrate sources can meet with a librarian at The Term Paper Clinic (held in the main campus library). The Writing Center also helps with research, but tutors often refer students to the Clinic when the students need more resources than are available at the Center or when they would further benefit from the knowledge of an information literacy expert. When the library and Writing Center partnered to offer the Writing and Research Clinic, one tutor and one librarian jointly met with students. This allowed students who had writing and/or research questions to meet with a librarian and a writing center tutor in one location and at the same time.

As we offer more sections of Accelerated Academic Writing, the Writing Center will continue to broaden its tutoring...
base to include information literacy and will thus be prepared to support the larger population of students in the standard research and argument class as that class benefits from the information literacy model that we are developing. In addition to some of the writing assistance already offered—like helping students in brainstorming research topics and integrating sources, the Writing Center will increasingly need to help first-year composition students locate and evaluate sources and use those sources effectively and ethically.

Beyond and outside of English 103, the pilot collaboration with librarians also suggests ways to revise the Writing Center mission statement to include the ACRL standards for information literacy, especially as information literacy becomes a university-wide focus.

It is equally important that the Writing Center continue to support not only students, but instructors and faculty, too. The Writing Center is already in the habit of teaming up with the Undergraduate Writing Program to offer teacher workshops on topics such as “how to avoid plagiarism in the writing class” and “how to respond and evaluate student writing.” The Writing Center, the Undergraduate Writing Program, and the Libraries will collaborate again to offer an information literacy workshop for those who teach writing and writing-intensive classes. And the Writing and Research Clinic jointly sponsored by the Libraries and the Writing Center will certainly continue. Such partnerships reemphasize critical writing, reading, and researching as an integrated literacy practice.

**The Importance of Feedback: Student-Guided Revisions to the Course**

Instructors, tutors, and librarians all made a point of seeking student comments through the course in a variety of ways. In addition to the online surveys following the library sessions, we also invited sustained reflections at the middle and end of the term. The students let us know what was working. This first statement comes from a freshman engineering major—intense, anxious to learn, and full of academic drive. He says: “The library sessions have shown me more proper, reliable methods of researching my interests through the utilization of accredited, professionally-reviewed literary databases… [in order to] back my ideas with credible resources, rather than only well worded personal opinion.”

A sophomore Biology major had this to say about the first information literacy sessions: “The library sessions revealed a wealth of new resources, such as Google’s advanced search and Network Solutions that have proven extremely helpful in gathering legitimate information on non-scientific topics.” By semester’s end, she reflected on her newly acquired research skills: “In high school I had no qualms with turning immediately to Wikipedia or any site that looked reputable for information to use in a paper. Now I go straight to EBSCO-host, JSTOR, or my personal favorite, the bookshelves.”

As a result of the revisions to the library sessions, the student comments now reflect increasingly positive responses. In the student survey, most students now say they find the library sessions “informative.” No one made any negative comments about being “taught how to use Google.” The comments about revised Research Log 1 were also positive; many students commented that the activities helped them focus their topic. Our student survey this semester shows that our changes are yielding some strong improvements when compared to the first semester’s numbers (Fall 2006). Here’s what the numbers tell us at the end of our two-year pilot program:

- 100% of spring semester 2008 students say that amount of information presented in the library sessions is “the right amount” (which is up 23% compared to the response we received during the first term in fall 2006).
- 100% of spring semester 2008 students say they understand the benefits and risks of doing research on the Internet (up 6% from fall 2006).
- 100% of spring semester 2008 students say they understand strategies for evaluating websites (up 27% from fall 2006).
- 97% of spring semester 2008 students say they understand how to find a focus for their research problem (up 34% from fall 2006).

When students see a direct correlation to their researching and writing goals, they appear to embrace their expanded audience of librarians. They recognized the librarians as instructors and gatekeepers of electronic access and delivery systems, and as experts who could help them narrow a topic, find legitimate support for their ideas, and even serve as a sounding board for those ideas. As one student put it, “The library sessions revealed a wealth of new resources, such as Google’s advanced search and [www.netsol.com](http://www.netsol.com) that have proven extremely helpful in gathering legitimate information on non-scientific topics.”

Now that we have completed the two-year pilot, the instructor-librarian relationship is very solid and we have, as one of the librarians put it, established a model that we can now expand to other writing courses. As we think about scaling up from eight sections to 80 sections, not every instructor or student will know the librarians as personally as
those who participated in the pilot, but the feedback provided by the smaller cohort has helped fine-tune activities, questions, and assignments that will ensure that any web-based tutorials will be responsive to specific student needs. We also plan to continue using student and instructor surveys to be sure that the crucial feedback component remains strong as we continue to revise and expand.

Reflecting on What We’ve Learned

The instructors teaching the pilot sections of English 103 provided feedback on the effectiveness of the information literacy sessions in teaching journals, surveys, and on-going conversations with the librarians. The instructors have been consistently positive, but their survey responses at the end of the two-year pilot are overwhelmingly enthusiastic:

- 100% of instructors found the library instruction sessions and the research logs useful to students for completing their class assignments.
- 100% noticed that the research sources their students selected are more on-target.
- 100% noticed improvement in their students’ research papers due to the library instruction the students received.

Equally compelling are the instructors’ written comments over the two years of the pilot. Here’s a quick sample: “My students and I collectively enjoyed the information literacy sessions. I believe the library sessions were well thought out and well executed, so kudos to the librarians.” In terms of revisions, an instructor from the first year of the collaboration noted the need to think about how to use shared class time well: “The instructors need to prepare their students for the [library] sessions and keep their assignments relevant to the research plan introduced by the librarians.” As a plan of action, yet another instructor acknowledged the role of the Writing Center in this project: “Next semester I will take my students to the Writing Center early on and push students to use the Center as a way of staying on track.”

One suggestion consistent among the instructors in the first semester of the pilot (Fall 2006) was the need to relate the library sessions’ research log activities directly to the students’ topics for their major essay assignments. Instructors were aware that some students were unable to pursue the topic they used to complete their first two research logs, in effect creating an assignment that served no immediate purpose. Instructors realized that they needed to prepare students for the information literacy sessions by introducing the next major assignment, incorporating class discussion and inventing exercises before the students met with the librarians.

This collaborative project encouraged writing faculty, tutors, and librarians to re-examine professional and disciplinary boundaries, and resulted in new assignments and activities that successfully engage students in the intertwined processes of research, reading, and writing. We’re glad we did it. We want to wrap up by sharing four lessons we’ve learned.

We are just completing the two-year pilot collaboration. By fall 2009, we hope to extend the faculty-librarian-writing center collaboration beyond the small number of accelerated academic writing sections to reach many sections of the required research-and-argument course that serves over 3,000 students a year. By fall of 2010, we hope that all sections of this large-enrollment course will benefit from a close association with the university libraries as well as our writing center.

At the outset of this project, the librarians and the writing instructors shared the hope that students would come to see the processes of research and writing as recursive and intertwined. This last instructor comment from spring 2008 suggests that we have made progress toward this shared goal:

Students gained confidence from being able to gather good sources. This improved writing. And they also used research at several stages of the writing process, which was invaluable. Faced with organizational problems, problems with an argument or explanation, or just being stuck in a rut with a draft, they could go BACK to doing more research at this later stage.

This comment reflects a consistent observation made by both the librarians and the instructors: students research more thoroughly, evaluate sources more critically, and integrate that research and critical thinking as part of their writing process.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This collaborative project encouraged writing faculty, tutors, and librarians to re-examine professional and disciplinary
boundaries, and resulted in new assignments and activities that successfully engage students in the intertwined processes of research, reading, and writing. We’re glad we did it. We want to wrap up by sharing four lessons we’ve learned.

1. **Collaboration depends on communication.** We learned that we needed several channels to keep communication lines open among all team members: a combination of emails, meetings, web-based resources, and regular surveys helped give everyone a voice.

Even so, it has been easy for the Writing Center to fall out of the loop this year when we no longer had a member of the Writing Center teaching one of the sections. We still advertise our services to the writing students in the pilot sections, but we lost the close collaborative connection. We are already thinking of things we can do in the future to make sure that someone from the Writing Center remains integral either as a teacher of one of the sections, or (on a larger scale) by implementing a Writing Fellows program where tutors visit course sections at strategic points during the semester to offer their perspectives on the writing and research processes, offer advice on particularly challenging assignments, assist with peer review, and so forth.

We are also aware that communication will remain our biggest challenge as we increase the number of teachers, librarians, and tutors involved in this collaborative approach to research and writing.

2. **Collaboration depends on teamwork.** Instructors, tutors, and librarians must keep in mind that they are a team. What one person does affects the other members of the team. We learned this lesson the hard way when one instructor changed an assignment and didn’t let the librarian know ahead of time. When the librarian delivered her lesson, it was no longer relevant for the students. Everyone was frustrated.

3. **Collaboration depends on feedback—and lots of it.** Student course evaluations alone are ineffective for evaluating a program such as this one. The surveys of students, instructors, and librarians (and clearly we should add the tutors) help assess the effectiveness of the information literacy sessions and their ultimate impact on the work submitted for final portfolio. Instructors are also asked to keep a teaching journal and then write a reflection at the end of each semester. This is where even the most autonomous teachers tend to become aware of why teamwork has to take priority.

4. **Collaboration can be time-intensive.** We admit that the communication and coordination that are so central to the success of this program both take time. We are lucky to have a very committed group, but it also helped to have some summer support to offer the initial team members, and we have kept course sizes as low as we can (about 16 per section) as another way of supporting innovation and collaboration.

To sum up: the lessons we’ve learned tend to overlap. Communication builds community and teamwork; feedback helps solve problems that may pose challenges to communication and teamwork. The collaboration can be time-intensive, but it is also very rewarding. Would we do it all again? Absolutely.

**Appendices**

Appendices are also available as a [Microsoft Word file](http://compositionforum.com/issue/19/west-virginia.php).

1. Appendix 1: Research Log 1: Evaluating Internet Resources/Using Lexis-Nexis
3. Appendix 3: Research Log 3: Finding Articles
4. Appendix 4: Grading Rubrics for Research Logs 1, 2, and 3

**Appendix 1: Research Log 1**

Evaluating Internet Resources / Using Lexis-Nexis

**Name:**

**Section and Professor’s Name:**

**Date:**


   1. Write down as many words, phrases, or images you associate with education (think about grade, middle, and
high school or college life). Consider how education is portrayed in the media (e.g., in movies, television, music). Also think about how your family and friends describe or talk about education. Consider ideas both inside and outside of the classroom.

2. Based on your lists above, what aspect of education would you like to research the most? Write a down a narrow and focused research question based on this topic.

3. What are the important keywords and phrases in this research question?

4. Come up with as many synonyms as you can for your key words and phrases and write them down.

5. Use Google’s Basic Search to research your question and find a website for your next essay. Copy the search terms below exactly as you entered them into Google.

6. Browse through a few sites on the first page. Which site is the most relevant to your research question? Why? Be specific.

II. Evaluating Websites

1. **Title and Address**
   - Pick one web site among your Google search results that you’d like to use for your next essay.
   - What is the title of the site and its URL (address)?

2. **Authority and Affiliation**
   - Who is the author or sponsoring institution / organization listed on the webpage?
   - Is this website a government site? That is, does it have a URL that ends in .gov?
   - If it isn’t a government site, go to Network Solutions (http://www.netsol.com) to find out who owns the site. Write down the owner of the site and the contact information.
   - Do you think this person or organization is a credible source of information? Why or why not? Be specific.

3. **Timeliness**
   - When was the page first published or last updated?
   - Does the date matter? Why or why not? Be specific.

4. **Coverage**
   - What questions do you have about the topic that the website does not answer? Be specific. ("No questions" is not an acceptable answer.)

5. **Final Analysis**
   - Do you think your professor would want you to use this page? Why or why not? Be specific.

III. Lexis - Nexis

At the WVU Libraries' homepage (http://www.libraries.wvu.edu), under **Popular Databases** select **Lexis-Nexis**. Make sure you use **Guided News Search** for this exercise.

**For this exercise, you'll find a newspaper article for your next essay.**

1. Write down your search terms exactly as you entered them into the LexisNexis search.

2. How many records are found? ________________________

3. Are these results too few, too many, or just right? Explain why.

4. Skim through your results and choose a news article you'd like to use for your essay. Write down its information:

   Name of the newspaper: __________________________________________

   Issue Date: _______

   Section: _________

   Length: __________

   Headline: ________________________________

   Byline: ________________________________
5. Why would this be a good article for your essay? Be specific.

**Appendix 2: Research Log 2**

Finding Books

Name:

Section and Professor’s Name:

Research Question:

For this exercise, you’ll search MountainLynx Catalog, go to a WVU Library, find two books, and evaluate their usefulness for your next essay.

Go to the MountainLynx Catalog at [http://mountainlynx.lib.wvu.edu](http://mountainlynx.lib.wvu.edu)

1. Select Assisted Search and write down the words/phrases exactly as you typed them in the blanks:

   How many books did this search retrieve?

2. From your list of results, select one book that is “Not Checked Out” and write down the following information:

   Author(s)/Editor(s):

   Title:

   Publisher:

   Date & place of publication:

   Call Number:

3. Go the Library and find the book. Look over the table of contents, the index, and skim the Preface or Introduction chapter; this method is a good way to get an understanding of a book’s content.

4. Now write a well-developed paragraph, using specific reasons, why or why not this book would be a good choice for your essay. Discuss how the information in the book will or won’t help you answer your research question.

5. Browse the other books shelved nearby. Write down the information of one additional book that might be a good source for your essay:

   Author(s)/Editor(s):

   Title:

   Publisher:

   Date & place of publication:

   Call Number:

6. Review the book as you did in question 3. Now write a well-developed paragraph, using specific reasons, why or why not this book would be a good choice for your essay. Discuss how the information in the book will or won’t help you answer your research question.

**Appendix 3: Research Log 3**

Finding Articles

Name:

Section and Professor’s Name:
Research Question:

For this activity, you'll search 3 databases for articles, choose two articles, and evaluate their usefulness for your next essay.

1. Choose 3 databases to search. (Remember that EbscoHost isn't a database as such, but a collection of databases. You can pick databases within EbscoHost, like Academic Search Premier.)

What 3 databases did you choose and why did you choose them? Please be specific; think about how the scope of the databases relate to your research question.

2. What search terms did you use for each database?

3. Where you satisfied with your results? Why or why not? Please be specific.

4. Which database seemed to be the most helpful? Please be specific.

5. Choose two articles from your results. Write down the full citation information for each article.

ARTICLE 1

Author:

Title of the article:

Name of the journal/magazine:

Volume number: Issue number:

Page number: Date of issue:

Today's date (when the article was retrieved):

Read or carefully skim the article. Now write a well-developed paragraph, using specific reasons, why or why not this article would be a good choice for your essay. Discuss how the information in the article will or won't help you answer your research question.

ARTICLE 2

Author:

Title of the article:

Name of the journal/magazine:

Volume number: Issue number:

Page number: Date of issue:

Today’s date (when the article was retrieved):

Read or carefully skim the article. Now write a well-developed paragraph, using specific reasons, why or why not this article would be a good choice for your essay. Discuss how the information in the article will or won’t help you answer your research question.

Appendix 4: Grading Rubrics for Research Logs 1, 2, & 3

Rubric for Research Log 1: Evaluating Internet Resources/Using Lexis-Nexis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>grade</th>
<th>description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent (A)</td>
<td>Completely answers all of the questions; answers to analytical questions are well-developed, original, providing detailed and specific reasons to support claims.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good (B)</td>
<td>Completely answers all of the questions; answers to analytical questions are developed and detailed,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rubric for Research Log 2: Finding Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent (A)</td>
<td>Clearly identifies two books to examine, providing AT LEAST THREE distinct reasons why the first book interests them. Demonstrates that they know how to use a good book to find additional books or sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good (B)</td>
<td>Clearly identifies two books to examine, providing AT LEAST TWO distinct reasons why the first book interests them. Demonstrates that they know how to use a good book to find additional books or sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair (C)</td>
<td>Identifies two books to examine, providing AT LEAST ONE distinct reason why the first book interests them. Demonstrates that they know how to use a book to find additional books or sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal (D)</td>
<td>Identifies one book to examine, providing no reason why the first book interests them. Does not complete Part 4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate (F)</td>
<td>The student did not turn in the assignment OR the assignment does not represent the student’s own original work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rubric for Research Log 3: Finding Articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent (A)</td>
<td>Completely answers all of the questions; identifies THREE articles. Provides multiple, specific, and detailed reasons why or why not sources are considered relevant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good (B)</td>
<td>Completely answers all of the questions; identifies THREE articles. Provides good general reasons why or why not sources are considered relevant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair (C)</td>
<td>Completely answers all of the questions; identifies TWO articles. Reasons for the results’ relevancy too general and not specific.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal (D)</td>
<td>Identifies ONE article. Does not adequately explain why or why not results are relevant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate (F)</td>
<td>The student did not turn in the assignment OR the assignment does not represent the student’s own original work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Works Cited


