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1997

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Recommended Citation

Faricy, Chris, A subject integrated approach to teaching library skills, *Overview - University of Wollongong Teaching & Learning Journal*, 4(1), 1997, 8-11.

Available at:<http://ro.uow.edu.au/overview/vol4/iss1/3>

A subject integrated approach to teaching library skills

Abstract

A key objective of the University of Wollongong is that all students should develop specific skills in research and a desired attribute of a University of Wollongong graduate is that they are equipped for lifelong learning!. Faculty Librarians at the University of Wollongong Library are committed to supporting academic staff in working towards these goals.

A Subject Integrated Approach to Teaching Library Skills

Chris Faricy

A key objective of the University of Wollongong is that all students should develop specific skills in research and a desired attribute of a University of Wollongong graduate is that they are equipped for lifelong learning¹. Faculty Librarians at the University of Wollongong Library are committed to supporting academic staff in working towards these goals.

Progressive academic libraries, such as the University of Wollongong Library, encompass a teaching role designed to enhance the research and learning process of the institutions within which they exist. Education is becoming a central function for Faculty Librarians, with an emphasis being placed on fostering the development of lifelong learning skills in both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

As Faculty Librarian for Health & Behavioural Sciences I have enjoyed a good relationship with academic staff from the Faculty and have worked closely with course coordinators to present appropriate information literacy skills classes to a broad cross section of students. The 100 level nursing program (NURS121) described here is a natural progression from the introductory information literacy classes I have presented in previous years.

In the process of revising the curriculum for 100 level Bachelor of Nursing, the subject coordinator approached me to plan and implement an information literacy program for these students. Clearly, the first step was to ensure that academic staff teaching these students were competent in the information searching skills they wished their students to acquire. A modified Research Edge² information literacy program was presented to nine academic staff members from the Department of Nursing. During the workshop traditional methods of information retrieval were reviewed, and some of the newer methods of accessing electronic resources were introduced.

With a clearer picture of the skills students would need to attain, the next step was to develop an information literacy program to be integrated into the Nursing curriculum. Research revealed that the University of Newcastle Library had been working on a similar program for their Nursing students, prompting an exchange of ideas and site visits to discuss similar programs and possible collaboration. Examples of best practice at the University of Wollongong, such as a program already in place in Wollongong for the 100 level Engineering studies, provided additional ideas for the program development.

Further discussions with the course coordinator indicated that we shared the common opinion that if the program was to be successful the following

elements would need to be considered:

- the importance of building information literacy assessment tasks into the subject curriculum
- in order to be effective, the information literacy assignment should carry a reward in the form of assessment marks
- integration of information literacy skills should be spread across the academic session, enabling students to build on information skills as required, to successfully complete the course
- students should experience success and a sense of accomplishment in their information literacy efforts

Students' information searching skills were measured by completion of an information literacy task. Credit value was assigned to the task to reinforce the value of the library research skills and provide a purpose for completing the assignment correctly. The information literacy assignment, which has been included in the subject is valued at 10% of the class mark. In an effort to reduce copying and ensure adequate resources are available in the Library, eight different versions of the assessment task were written, compelling students to complete the task independently. Questions were designed to direct students towards sources and resources which would be useful to them in their academic studies and their chosen profession. These resources included items in the Reserve Collection which have been placed there by the course coordinator, reference items such as encyclopaedias, government reports and medical dictionaries as well as basic anatomy texts, nursing assessment tools and basic medical textbooks. Also included in the assessment tasks were references to journal articles which required the student to physically locate at least one of the nursing journals held in the Library. Students were also required to think critically and provide a rationale as to why key items would be valuable to them in their studies.

Program Outline

To ensure information literacy skills were integrated into the curriculum, lectures and tutorials presented by the Faculty Librarian were planned over the first five weeks of session. Previously all the concepts had either been compressed into a one hour class at the

start of session, or students were expected to gain the skills independently, with little thought being given to the needs of the students as they relate to the subject curriculum.

All first year undergraduate students are required to complete a basic Compulsory Library Information Program. The research skills lecture which was presented during Week 2 was designed to further develop the concepts already taught in the Compulsory Library Introductory Program, and to familiarise students with the skills which would be required for them to successfully complete their first assessment task for NURS121 (see Assessment Task Appendix 1).

Practice examples were taken from the nursing curriculum content, ensuring that the topic was directly related to student needs. The lecture was activity based, with participants being asked to complete a number of small tasks throughout the lecture. One very practical concept which was introduced was mapping a search strategy, as shown in the spidergram below. This method of research planning can be applied to any future assignments.

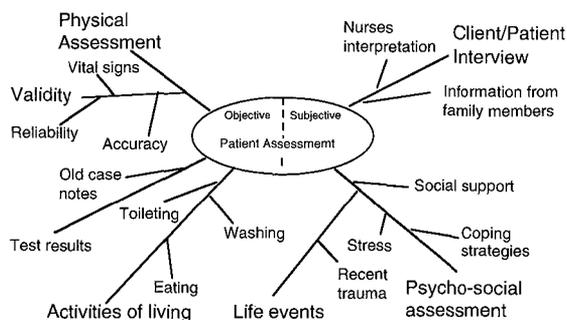


Figure 1 : Mapping using a spidergram

During Week 2 students also attended tutorials conducted in the Library. Tutors accompanied each group, facilitating a team teaching situation and reinforcing the importance being placed on the information literacy component of their assessment. Smaller groups provided me with the opportunity to interact with the group and to demonstrate elements of information retrieval not available in a lecture theatre.

By Week 5 students had been introduced to the importance of current research by their lecturers. It was timely then for another research skills class which dealt with locating items in the journal literature. This was facilitated firstly in the lecture situation, where the skills already gained were reviewed, and the concept of using electronic databases to access literature in journals was developed. Students then attended the library where part of the tutorial was devoted to "hands on" practice on the Library's range of electronic databases. Students were required to use the skills learned during these sessions to locate 5 journal articles on one of four specified nursing related topics, which then formed the basis for their next essay.

It is expected that this integrated approach to information literacy skills will have a number of positive outcomes because:

- skills were taught by the librarian where and when the students need them in their academic program
- research skills were taught in a logical sequence in conjunction with the academic program
- research skills were directly linked to an assessment task providing students with justification for information literacy skills
- students' efforts were rewarded by the allocation of assessment marks for the completion of relevant work
- a coordinated approach by the Subject Coordinator, Tutors and Faculty Librarian reflected a collaborative approach to developing sound research skills
- all research tasks were designed to maximise student opportunities of experiencing success, thus developing the research confidence of each student in their attempts to become, as described by the Course Coordinator Margaret Wallace, 'informed skeptics' and 'evidence based practitioners'

Evaluation of the program

Students were pre-tested in Week 2 prior to the lecture and will be given a post-test in Week 8. The aim is to

determine if there has been a change in the attitudes and skills of the students. The post-test has been scheduled to allow the students time to undertake independent research for various essays and to evaluate their own skills and attitudes to Library research. This method of assessment should provide the Course Coordinators and the Faculty Librarian with feedback on the effectiveness of the program. They will be able to gauge how students approached particular research questions before the opportunity of attending the specially designed classes, and after they have had the benefit of skills instruction, which they should have acquired over the eight week period.

Beyond NURS121

This first year program should be perceived as just one step in developing nursing students as life long researchers, equipped with some basic skills in locating, evaluating and using information. It is important that the process should be layered, with further research skills being introduced in subsequent years to enable the students to effectively progress through their academic studies. The long term objective, however, is to develop Nursing professionals who relish the research process, and are able to use the literature to make informed decisions about the health care issues they will encounter in their professional careers.

¹ University of Wollongong (1993), *Towards 2000: First Year Progress Report*, Wollongong, The University

² The Research Edge is a 15 hour intensive course for postgraduate students. The course focuses on the information skills required by postgraduate students and includes sessions on the research process, library services, search strategies, record keeping, book and journal material, CD ROMs, email, electronic discussion groups and the internet. The course is activity based and includes a large number of "hands on" sessions. A number of the sessions were modified and presented to nursing academic staff.

NURS121/132: Vital Signs Assignment Part 1 1997

The aim of this assignment is to enable all students to use the resources of the University of Wollongong Library effectively. Materials relevant to your course are located in various parts of the Library.

When giving bibliographic citations (references) use the Harvard System of Referencing, as documented in the *Department of Nursing Student Assessment Handbook* (purple book), or refer to the AGPS Style Manual (4th edition), which is located in the Reference Collection (686.2252/2).

This is Part 1 of the Vital Signs Assignment. Parts 1 and 2 together are worth 10% of the total mark for NURS121 and 5% of NURS132. Part 1 is to be submitted by **Wednesday April 23, 1997**.

1. Go to the Reserve Collection in the Library and locate the book with the call number **610.73/241** and give a full bibliographic citation for this item.
2. Give the full bibliographic citation for the latest edition of the item with the call number **362.10994/32/**
3. Locate the item **R 611.00222/4** on the shelves in the Reference Collection. Give the full bibliographic citation for this item. Write one sentence on how this item may be useful to you in your nursing studies.
4. What is the call number for the *Journal of Advanced Nursing*. Retrieve volume 16 (1991) of this journal from the shelves and give the full bibliographic citation for Reid's article about methodology which begins on Page 544.
5. Locate a video about the care and treatment of wounds.
What is its call number?

Where in the library is this item located? (Give floor level and name of the collection)

6. Locate the book by Arthur C Guyton called *Textbook of Medical Physiology*

What is the call number of this item?

What is the latest (most recent) edition of this book held by the Library? (Give edition number and year)

7. Use the Catalogue to determine the location and title of the book with the call number **612/124**.
On which floor of the Library will this item be found?
Give the full bibliographic citation for the most recent edition of this item
Will this item and those located near it on the shelves be of value to you in your Nursing Studies?
Explain your answer in two or three sentences
8. When starting your research assignment it is useful to check the **Reserve Collection** to determine if any of the recommended references are available. Use the Catalogue to locate a list of all items located in the Reserve Collection for NURS121. Give location, call number and complete bibliographic citation for one book from the list.
9. Use the Catalogue to locate an atlas on human physiology which is located in the **Reference Collection**. Retrieve this item from the shelf and give its full bibliographic citation.
10. Your first nursing assignment is about vital signs and nursing. Use the Catalogue to locate 2 books on this topic (Hint - use the Word search option and type in vital signs nursing). Give full bibliographic citations for each of these items. Include the call numbers and locations.
What is another subject you could use to locate items on this topic?