



Concept/Context: Information Literacy and Assessment in the First Year

At Augustana College (Rock Island, IL), where the academic calendar consists of trimesters, all first-year students enroll in a year-long sequence of three "Liberal Studies First Year" (LSFY) courses, which are taught by faculty from a variety of disciplines. LSFY emphasizes core competencies in reading, writing, oral communication, and information literacy.

LSFY 101: Rhetoric and the Liberal Arts

Offers practice in writing and research, emphasizing accurate, effective thought and expression

LSFY 102: How does the past deepen our understanding of the human condition?

Develops the skills introduced in LSFY 101 in the context of an overarching theme chosen by the professor

LSFY 103: How do we embrace the challenges of our diverse and changing world?

Builds on the engagement with scholarly work that began in LSFY 101 and 102, asking students to develop their own research question and craft a case-making paper over the course of the term

This progression from LSFY 101 to 103 allows faculty and librarians to build students' research skills over the course of the year. For example, targeted information literacy skills evolve from "basic" mechanical skills in the fall term to more nuanced, sophisticated skills during the winter and spring:

FALL: LSFY 101

Typically in the fall term, librarians introduce students to the library catalog (ALiCat), a general article database such as Academic Search Premier, and the reference collection.

WINTER: LSFY 102

In the winter, librarians help students identify the kinds of materials (popular and scholarly, primary and secondary) needed for an assignment, formulate a corresponding search strategy, and critically evaluate sources.

SPRING: LSFY 103

In the spring, librarians might lead students through the process of crafting a research question, first helping them explore sources that address the question, and then encouraging them to modify and develop the initial research question as a result of what they have encountered.

Number of LSFY faculty who partnered with librarians, 2011-2012: **59 / 70**

Number of first-year library instruction sessions, 2011-2012: **151**

Number of first-year library instruction sessions 2012-2013 [as of 2/1/2013]: **97**



Stefanie Bluemle, Amanda Makula, & Margi Rogal
Reference Librarians
Thomas Tredway Library

Augustana College
www.augustana.edu/library

Performance-Based Assessment

Since 2011, the Augustana librarians have been using performance-based assessment to evaluate their work with LSFY classes. This qualitative approach, which encourages real-life application of skills, has proven well-suited to an information literacy program in which concepts carry more weight than the mechanics of searching.

Each term, the librarians **identify** one or more skills from the first-year information literacy skills matrix, and then **design** a performance-based assessment targeted to that skill(s). Here are two examples:

FALL LSFY 101:

From the skills matrix:

"Use reference materials to select a topic and to locate reliable background information"

Performance-based assessment:

-a worksheet asking students to identify two areas of the Reference collection to browse for information on their topic, to select a book from one of those areas and read and summarize its entry on their topic, and to use the book's call number to locate a second book on their topic in the library's circulating stacks

WINTER LSFY 102:

From the skills matrix:

"Determine which forms of information are appropriate for a research topic"

Performance-based assessment:

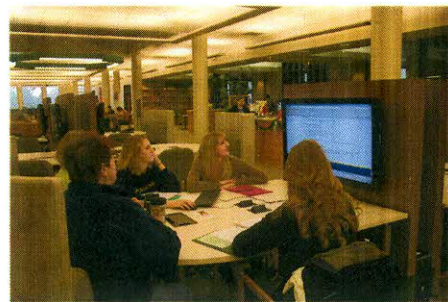
-an activity in which students select one source that is appropriate for their research, based on the criteria of the assignment and a librarian-led class discussion; they cite the source and write a short defense explaining why it is valuable for their project

Each librarian **studies** the completed assessment activity, **charting** the number of students who correctly fulfilled the components of the assignment.

At the end of the term, the librarians meet to **compare** their teaching methods and results from the **assessment**. They identify trends in student understanding of the skill and develop better **means** of teaching the skill in the future. Thanks to this assessment method, the library has **qualitative data** about students' skills including: navigating the Library of Congress classification, evaluating sources beyond the database record, and developing viable research questions.

Highlights of performance-based assessment:

- fully-integrated into the class session
- useful to students (e.g., gives them a possible source for an assignment)
- provides information about the concepts librarians most commonly teach, thus directly fueling improvement in their work



For a good introduction to performance-based assessment and other information literacy assessment methods, see: Oakleaf, Megan. "Dangers and Opportunities: A Conceptual Map of Information Literacy Assessment Approaches." *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 8.3 (2008): 233-253. Web.