Assessing Hands-On Learning in Special Collections: A Pilot Study

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Assessing Hands-on Learning in Special Collections: A Pilot Study

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Data

Document Analysis: pre- and post-test evaluation

- Rubric created by team leader
- Scale of 1 to 4
- Faculty evaluations
- Pre- and post-test not identified for evaluators

We saw a decrease in four of five scores on post-test:
- Only engagement/cultural understanding was significant
- Materiality scores increased

- Working with original materials led students to:
  - think more deeply about the nature of materials
  - look beyond the test
  - Students comment on fonts, borders, and ornamentation

No significant differences in student scores
- The ability to communicate, organize, and synthesize information ("use") is the category in which students using Special Collections scored higher.
- Looking at disparate materials may have caused students to better compile and blend their sources.

Paper analysis
- AACRL specific for information literacy with no search section
- Scale of 0 to 4
- Faculty evaluations
- Whether students used Special Collections not identified, though might be obvious from context

Claims & Contributions

Our data was inconclusive, showing significant change in only one set of scores in each part of the study. There are several potential reasons for this:

Time and exposure: Many students visited Special Collections only one to three times.

Document analysis exercise:
- Differences in the pre- and post-test documents . . .
  - Pre-test document had an obvious empathetic connection
  - Post-test documents required more specific contextual knowledge
  - . . . may have contributed to the lower scores on the post-test, especially the statistically significant decline in the engagement category.

Papers:
Papers came from multiple classes with different assignments and teachers.

However, we were pleased to see students making good rhetorical and empathetic connections, as evidenced by their papers.

Conclusions & Recommendations

- Explore options for having students come in more frequently as a group in order to work together to build skills.
- Evaluate the same students at the end of their sophomore or junior year to see if further experience with original primary materials shows an effect.

Further Research

- More research on pre- and post-test documents for:
  - Depth of historical knowledge required to contextualize well
  - Physical elements
  - Obvious moments for empathy
  - To minimize questions about whether differences between the documents contributed to student performance.

We hope that this pilot study provides the special collections community with a useful example of assessment of student learning, as well as examples of methods that could be useful in developing more robust performance assessment programs.