

Online library research refresher activities for third-year transfer students by Nia Lam and Chelsea Nesvig

Introduction

Academic libraries have the opportunity to engage and support transfer students in a variety of ways. Beyond orientation and outreach efforts, librarians can partner with faculty to offer information literacy instruction that is tailored to transfer student needs. The University of Washington Bothell & Cascadia College Campus Library, which serves both schools, has recently developed online “refresher” activities for upper division students to review important library research skills. This chapter will describe how harnessing a required course with a substantial proportion of transfer students ensures they receive the support needed for research success in this course and beyond.

Background

One of the three University of Washington (UW) campuses, UW Bothell enrolls more than 5,000 undergraduate students each school year (University of Washington Bothell, 2020). A significant number of these undergraduate students transfer from two-year colleges and other higher education institutions in order to complete their undergraduate degrees. During fall quarter 2019, 39 percent of the 5,813 enrolled undergraduates were classified as transfer students (University of Washington Office of Planning & Budgeting, 2020). Of these transfer students, 86 percent transferred from a Washington State community college. UW Bothell shares a campus with Cascadia College, and this colocation offers “a unique, and effective means for students to attend a two-year college and transfer directly into a four-year institution on the same campus”

(Cascadia College, 2019). Cascadia and UW Bothell share the Campus Library which is part of the University of Washington library system. Students, faculty, and staff at both schools have full access to library resources and services, including information literacy instruction for targeted classes. Subject librarians partner with faculty at both schools and support all students.

The School of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences (IAS) is one of five schools at UW Bothell, offering its students sixteen majors and eight minors across a variety of disciplines. While each major has required courses, all students in an IAS major are required to enroll in the course Bothell Interdisciplinary Studies (BIS) 300: Interdisciplinary Inquiry, which is a “collaborative effort between IAS faculty and the staff of the Library, Writing Center, and Quantitative Skills Center” (University of Washington Bothell, n.d.). This course serves as a foundation for students’ interdisciplinary education and ties directly to one of the five IAS learning outcomes: the ability to engage in interdisciplinary research. Each BIS 300 instructor is assigned a librarian partner who consults on research assignment design and co-teaches classroom or online information literacy instruction. Librarians can also provide one-on-one research consultations for BIS 300 students. In the course, faculty and librarians aim to help students become better researchers as students explore the research process, interact with different source types, and pose and revise research questions.

Because multiple IAS faculty teach this course every quarter, there is an established teaching group which meets regularly to share different approaches to teaching the course. Librarians are invited to participate in the teaching group, and librarians and faculty generally have strong partnerships focused on the course learning goals. We have had continuing discussions about the information literacy (IL) concepts commonly taught in this course, and

have asked faculty to help us prioritize IL goals for in-person workshops or online assignments. During one of our conversations, a faculty member shared that their students were requesting that faculty provide short multiple-choice practice quizzes, because students wanted the opportunity to “check their understanding” of content in a low-stakes way.

Teaching group conversations also noted the increasing number of transfer students enrolled in this course. In an average fall quarter, 55 percent of students in IAS have transferred from a Washington State Community College and have not necessarily received introductions to library resources and basic research skills (Rachel Foote, email to author, March 20, 2020). UW Bothell transfer students receive a brief tour of the library space during their optional campus orientation but do not interact with librarians. Faculty and librarians wondered if transfer students were sometimes at a disadvantage due to completing their first two years of college elsewhere, which may or may not have included robust IL instruction. Our desire to introduce transfer students to library services and resources, along with the idea of providing low-stakes opportunities to check understanding, inspired us to create online “refresher” activities for all Interdisciplinary Inquiry students to review important library research skills.

Literature Review

A distinct population among undergraduate students at colleges and universities, transfer students arrive on their new campuses bearing a wide variety of experiences gained at past institutions. Much of the library science literature around transfer students seeks to answer questions related to their overall challenges, including library research (Robison, Fawley, and Marshall 2020), their past information literacy instruction experiences (Robison 2017), as well as

their baseline information literacy skills upon arrival on their transfer campus (Grigg and Dale 2017, Tong and Moran 2017). Using methods both qualitative (online surveys and in-person interviews) and quantitative (Project SAILS), this research draws useful conclusions related to transfer students' knowledge and needs around libraries and research skills (Tong and Moran 2017).

Robison (2017) surveyed new transfer students and learned that they saw themselves as needing information about how to use the library on their new campus, but ideally would like to receive this information in a collective way, as “respondents shied away from situations in which they might be singled out, such as meeting or emailing one-on-one with a librarian” (522). The survey results also showed that students who received information literacy instruction as part of a class showed increased confidence in finding sources for any current class as well as at their previous institution.

Through in-person interviews with transfer students at three institutions, Robison, Fawley, and Marshall (2020) found that some transfer students specifically noted their deficits related to library use and research, highlighting “the challenges that librarians face in reaching this population, particularly with transfer students who enter as juniors or seniors” (5). Tong and Moran (2017) addressed approaches to transfer students and concluded that “university libraries should work to target upper-level research courses, and not assume all students had exposure to the library from first-year courses” (296). Robison, Fawley, and Marshall (2020) reached a similar conclusion, noting that transfer student-specific orientations or instruction sessions are

not always viable and additionally may not meet the unique needs of individual transfer students.

In considering transfer students' needs overall, Tong and Moran (2017) stated that: "...college libraries should actively pursue ways to address the unique needs of transfer students so as to play a more fundamental role in the transition, retention and ultimate success of transfer students" (296). Additionally, Robison, Fawley, and Marshall (2020) concluded that "due to organizational and time constraints, holding separate, transfer-specific orientations or instruction sessions may not be an option, and one cannot expect transfer students to self-identify their needs to librarians" (6). The literature suggests that using best practices based on research while also adapting to a particular campus and its culture will help ensure transfer students' experiences with the library are both rewarding and productive.

Design of Online Refresher Activities

Creating these refresher activities involved brainstorming topic ideas, designing content, asking other librarians for feedback, and finally, bringing in feedback from student employees in the library. First, the authors gathered subject librarians who support IAS majors, and asked what IL concepts they would like IAS students to learn or refresh during the beginning of upper-level course work. Our initial list of topics included introduction to library resources, Boolean search strategies, locating books, setting up Interlibrary Loan accounts, and reflection on past research experiences. These topics are particularly relevant to transfer students who are new to campus and would not have experienced the same first-year IL instruction with librarians as four-year UW Bothell students.

Next, we began designing online activities around the five topics listed above. The University of Washington currently uses Canvas as its official learning management system, and librarians are comfortable designing and inserting content into courses, with faculty collaboration and approval. Librarians also use shared Canvas courses in order to share, reuse, and adapt online teaching materials. Therefore, we could put the refresher activities in our shared course and any librarian working with an Interdisciplinary Inquiry section could add one or all into the course site for student learning and review.

The table below provides a brief overview of each of our five refresher activities, including format, length, and brief description. The specific questions used in Campus Library Resources and Boolean Search Strategies can be found in appendices A and B, respectively.

Activity Name	Format	Length	Brief Description
Campus Library Resources (See Appendix A)	Graded Survey	6 questions, estimated time to complete is less than 30 minutes	Students will watch the Campus Library video tour and be introduced to online resources like study room reservations, online chat, and subject research guides. Students will answer short essay questions about their previous research experience and Campus Library resources and services.
Your Research Experiences	Graded Survey	6 questions, estimated time to complete is less than 30 minutes	Students will answer short essay questions about their library and research experience.

Boolean Search Strategies (See Appendix B)	Practice Quiz	5 questions, estimated time to complete is less than 30 minutes	Students will watch 1-2 Boolean searching tutorials. Students will answer multiple choice questions to check their understanding of Boolean searching.
Locating Books	Practice Quiz	8 questions, estimated time to complete is less than 30 minutes	Students will watch two tutorials on searching for books and ebooks. Students will answer multiple choice questions to check their understanding of catalog records and obtaining books and ebooks.
Interlibrary Loan Account Setup	File Upload (Librarians who don't want to do a file upload assignment can copy the content and make a Canvas page or a handout with the instructions, but no requirement to submit a screenshot.)	Estimated time to complete is less than 30 minutes	Students will watch a video about Interlibrary Loan, and follow instructions to set up their own unique ILL account. They will take a photo or screenshot of their ILL account that shows their unique Net ID and upload to Canvas.

In most cases, librarians design Canvas content in the format of a quiz or survey. While we are not interested in “testing” students, these formats allow librarians to design activities that are typically a mixture of text-based instructions (or embedded video tutorials) and question prompts where students write in their responses. For example, a librarian can provide instructions and an example on brainstorming a list of keywords, and then ask students to provide their own list of keywords.

We designed two of our activities, “Campus Library Resources” and “Your Research Experience” as graded surveys, so students could write short responses in their own words. With

graded surveys, instructors do not have to manually grade the students' responses; students automatically receive full points when they submit their responses. Alternatively, the "Boolean Search Strategies" and "Finding Books" activities were designed as practice quizzes, as suggested by faculty during a teaching group conversation. With practice quizzes, students can answer multiple choice questions. When they submit their responses, students will see an explanation of correct responses, which allows them to check their understanding of concepts. For our "Interlibrary Loan Account Setup" activity, we adapted an assignment that had been created by our Nursing and Health Studies Librarian. Instead of a quiz format, this activity is a file upload. Students follow instructions on setting up their own Interlibrary Loan account and upload a screenshot of their account to Canvas.

After soliciting input on our draft refresher activities, the IAS librarians gave positive feedback and only minor suggestions for changes. Before these activities were deployed in BIS 300 sections, we sought an opportunity to receive feedback from student employees, all of whom attended UW Bothell, Cascadia College, or both, in the Campus Library. We added three student employees to our test Canvas course while providing the context that IAS students would be asked to complete these activities and gain some knowledge about library/research basics. We asked them to let us know if the activities made sense, if they had a logical flow, and if any questions arose while they were working through them. Our student employees told us they liked the activities overall and thought they would be helpful to students. One student provided a suggestion to revise one of the questions which was confusing to them. In addition to that suggestion, this student noted: "Overall I think the activities flowed logically and did a great job giving a student a fully rounded look at the library. The section about searching was informative

and I learned some new things as well!” After this stage, we were ready to roll out the activities to any librarian who wanted to use them.

Implementation in Courses

With faculty approval and collaboration, librarians began using the activities in course sites beginning fall 2018. For six quarters, from fall 2018 through winter 2020, a total of fifteen BIS 300 sections have used the online refresher activities. Based on an enrollment of 30 students per section, the online refresher activities have been shared with an estimated total of 480 students.

In the sections that the authors worked with, nearly all students completed the refresher activities. However, the number of students who actually completed some or all of them may vary per section and could depend on whether or not activities were designated as "required" assignments with points attached. For example, in one winter 2020 section, a required refresher activity about Campus Library Resources was completed by 29 out of 30 students, while an optional refresher activity about Boolean Searching was not completed by any of the thirty students.

After using the refresher activities across multiple sections and quarters, we have had time to adapt and improve our use of them. Librarians and faculty have worked together to customize the content in the following ways. In order to reduce the amount of refresher activities, one librarian combined “Campus Library Resource” and “Your Research Experiences” into one activity. Some librarians and faculty chose to change the format of practice quizzes into graded quizzes, so students can receive points for these activities. It should be noted that the

settings on graded quizzes can be set to include multiple attempts, so students are free to change their responses and re-submit multiple times, making it possible to receive full points. As more sections of the Interdisciplinary Inquiry are taught in hybrid learning formats, we have also decided that more IL concepts can be included in online activities; during winter 2020, we designed and deployed an additional refresher activity on Scholarly Sources.

BIS 300 Student Feedback

Initial use of these refresher activities in BIS 300 sections suggested that their inclusion was useful to students, but to receive more targeted feedback and better understand their impact, some librarians directly asked students about their value. In one section of BIS 300 during winter 2019, students completed two activities: Campus Library Refresher and Your Research Experiences prior to their first of two in-person library workshops. During a reflective exercise, students were asked to respond to the following question: “What was the value of the introductory library activities in Canvas (Campus Library Resources, Your Research Experiences)? Useful? Not useful? Why?”

While student feedback varied, all responses were either neutral or positive in response to the question. A sample of especially useful student responses is listed below:

- “This was helpful as a first year (transfer) student at Bothell. I did not know where or what kinds of resources were available and so it was useful knowing where study rooms, printing, and technology was located. It was also valuable reflecting on past research experiences and thinking about what kind of support I may need to improve my research skills.”
- “As someone who is completely new to the campus, I struggle with being unfamiliar with the entire area in general. I have a better idea of what the campus library is like after watching the video!”

- “The value of the introductory library activities were very helpful for me. Since this is my first year, I wasn’t aware of what the library could provide me with or where I could find what I needed.”
- “I found the introductory library activities extremely useful as a transfer student going back to school after 7+ years off; it helped make the unknown a little more familiar. I know I would not have sought help myself, or at least not know where to start to ask, otherwise.”
- “The introductory library activities were helpful in refreshing my brain on how the library works online and on campus. I attended Cascadia so I have used the library before, just needed a refresher on how it works.”
- “It was useful to reflect on all the resources in the library that I forget I have access to even though I’ve been here for three years.”

The above student comments bring to light the fact that students are willing to share their transfer status and identify even without being explicitly asked about it in the workshop prompt. This suggests an opportunity to encourage students to embrace this identity when navigating a new campus - through library research and beyond. Additionally, the reflections confirmed the utility of these activities not only for transfer students from other campuses, but as the final bullets note, students who began their undergraduate degrees at UW Bothell as well as at Cascadia College. This indicates that the activities are truly living up to their “refresher” description.

Conclusion

As of spring 2020, the online refresher activities remain an important part of several librarians’ instruction in the BIS 300 course. However, we’ve also identified several areas for improvement and future possible development of the program. First, the activities are often assigned as optional within particular sections, so we would like to investigate what further impact the activities would have if required by faculty who are instructors of record. In addition,

in the future, we may explore working with librarians who liaise with other UW Bothell schools to implement similar activities for their core, required courses.

Online refresher activities are a specific intervention librarians can use to engage and support transfer students as well as four-year students. Embedding these activities into an upper-division course required for all majors ensures most transfer students will access them while they are fairly new to the university. In designing the activities, librarians should include IL topics which they emphasize in first-year courses. Transfer students can be introduced to library resources and services, practice search strategies, and reflect on their own past research experiences. Four-year students can also refresh their understanding of these topics and skills. All students can move through the activities at their own pace, with the ability to review them in the future as long as they have access to the course management system. Finally, by collaborating with course instructors, librarians can customize the online refresher activities in order to help students be successful in their specific course and assignment goals.

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