Reframing From the Ground Up: Restructuring a For-credit Information Literacy Course Around the *Framework for Information Literacy*

Presented at the California Academic & Research Libraries 2018 Conference

April 13-15, 2018

San Francisco, California

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**Abstract**

This presentation will explored the process and application of transforming a for-credit, general education information literacy course to reflect the threshold concepts outlined in the 2015 *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* at Cal Poly Pomona. The presenter described the process of matching learning outcomes derived from the framework with required institutional learning outcomes, highlighted the shift in course organization, content and assessment these changes produced, and discussed student reception of those changes during the Fall 2017 and Winter 2018 academic quarters. This presentation also provided guidance for instruction librarians seeking to transform similar for-credit courses, identifying helpful resources, potential pitfalls and lessons learned along the way.

**Introduction**

This presentation documents the first part of a transformation still in progress, the restructuring of our for-credit information literacy course: LIB 150 along the lines of the *Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education*, which ACRL adopted in 2015.

To begin with, a little background. I began my current position at Cal Poly Pomona in September of 2016. This was a period of high turnover at our library, as 5 librarians either retired or took positions elsewhere, leaving us with an instruction department that was composed of relative newcomers, none of whom had participated in LIB 150’s original creation. However, over the course of the following school year, we got to know it extremely well. While LIB 150 was clearly a labor of love, by the end of Spring Quarter of 2017, those of us involved in teaching the class had noticed some glaring problems with the course. Put simply, LIB 150 needed a complete overhaul.

First, the course text book, Clay Johnson’s *The Information Diet* (which had also provided us with the course name, and likely a great deal of confusion for students in our Kinesiology program) was dated, underutilized, and viewed as problematic at best by most of the librarians working on the course. As many of the examples cited in the course literature were tech-related, and were all 3-4 years old by that point, they were also severely out of date.

Furthermore, we saw a strong disconnect between the theoretical discussion concepts we touched on in class, and the in class activities that would follow. For example, a discussion of smart appliances might be followed up by a citation exercise or a discussion of online privacy by an activity involving use of reference sources on an unrelated topic. At times, it seemed as if the course had been created with two conflicting goals in mind, and the resolution to that conflict had been to attempt to do both things at the same time. The result was an in class experience what was at best, eclectic, and at worst, incoherent.

Finally, the course structure, which relied heavily on the BlackBoard learning management system, was both rigid and extremely high maintenance, with passwords and due dates for nearly 40 learning objects having to be precisely reset every quarter. This process usually involved at least 2-3 hours of the Instruction Coordinator’s time each quarter, as well as a considerable amount of creative profanity on their part.

**Methods**

Therefore, in June of 2017, an ad-hoc committee composed of 5 teaching librarians and our systems librarian set out to drastically overhaul and update LIB 150. Our goals were ambitious. The structure of the course was to be shifted from a week-based course, to one based on 6 distinct modules, each of which was to be based on one of the Framework’s frames.

Take in Figure 1

*Figure 1: LIB 150’s new Framework-based structure*

Within each module, the individual lessons would each include a concept discussion and an in-class activity that related directly to each other, as well as relating in some way to the topic of the module that contained it. We would also be replacing our old textbook *The Information Diet*, with Matt Upson’s *Information Now!*, which we felt could be used throughout the class and whose graphic novel format we hoped would be more engaging to our students.

We also intended to replace the course final. The old course final had involved students picking a research topic at the beginning of the quarter and then performing a series of research activities about that topic, including searching for sources, citation of those sources and source assessment. The final itself was an essay in which the students would reflect on the research process. This was a solid assignment, but student engagement with it was low and the whole process seemed a bit artificial. We wanted something that would demonstrate a more direct application of the skills they were learning in the class, and increase their engagement with the material.

The first thing about the course that we overhauled was the course learning outcomes. As illustrated in Table 1 we attempted to simplify our objectives’ language and make them more easily measurable, and therefore assessable. We faced some limitations in revising our course learning outcomes due to the course being a part of the California State University’s General Education program. As a part of the “Lifelong Learning” area of that program, there were certain General Education learning outcomes that our course had to map to, so while we were free to revise the course that revision had to fall within certain boundaries.

Take in Table 1

In order to spread out the work, the librarians on the revision committee each volunteered to write one of our course modules. They would be expected to produce the following:

* Module learning outcomes that would map to the course learning outcomes
* 2-4 unique lesson plans (depending if it was a 1 or 2 week module) that included an internally coherent concept discussion and in class activity and connected to the larger module theme
* Readings and reading quizzes for each lesson in the module
* An end of module assessment that measured the student learning of the module learning outcomes.

We also changed the way we would be approaching reading quizzes for this course. In the old course, reading quizzes were done completely online in BlackBoard. Students had until 15 minutes before class to access the multiple-choice quiz, which they could take as many times as they wanted. The value of such assessments for ensuring recall of the readings was questionable, and the resetting of due dates for each of these quizzes composed the bulk of the time spent resetting the course at the beginning of every quarter. In the new model, reading quizzes would be done in the first 10 minutes of class. As these quizzes cumulatively represented 5% of a student’s overall grade, we hoped this change would help ensure on-time course attendance while also lowering the turnaround time for the course between quarters.

The revised final would be a group project in which the students would be assigned a Wikipedia stub and expected to apply the skills and concepts learned in class to improve the stub by adding information, citations and images. Through a partnership with the Wikimedia Education Foundation, Wikipedia provided our course with a dashboard, sandboxes and trainings in how to edit Wikipedia and Wikipedia Standards.

Now, I should probably point out here that between the six of us our combined experience in writing, or rewriting a course was effectively zero. Hence, it is not entirely surprising that our ambitions outstripped our abilities, or allotted time. Put simply, we bit off more than we could chew in this first round of revisions. That said, we did get an impressive amount of things done, including:

* 18 new lesson plans in which the readings, quizzes, discussions and activities were all internally coherent.
* The Wikipedia final project and trainings
* Adoption of a new textbook
* And the creation of two new end of module assessments (we ultimately ended up recycling 3 assessments from the old course)

**Results**

The 2017-18 school year has been our year to “test drive” the revised course. Over these three quarters, we have offered 4 sections of LIB 150 to a total of 90 students. During this period, we have gotten a good idea of what has worked, and what still needs work. Restructuring LIB 150 around the Framework’s Frames has been successful. Our lessons have felt much tighter and more coherent during the last three quarters. Clearer connections between lessons and activities have also led to an increased degree of student engagement with us, as well as with the material in the classroom. Student survey data from Fall 2017 also illustrated a noteworthy increase in student’s perception of competence in each of the course learning objectives.

The revision of reading quizzes, while ultimately successful began on a more rocky footing. The quizzes were originally all contained within BlackBoard. However, as problems with online access led to students not being able to take the quizzes during the limited time at the beginning of class, we transitioned to a paper quiz. In doing so, we have seen on-time attendance to class increase, and the turnaround of the course in BlackBoard between quarters has become considerably faster (and less profane).

The Wikipedia final has also been one of the key strengths of this course revision. It was mentioned frequently in the student survey as one of their favorite parts of the class. The final has involved a high degree of student engagement, as students who might not have been greatly concerned about the formatting of a final paper, suddenly became arch-perfectionists when told that the fruits of their labors would be visible on the 4th most accessed website on Earth. With very few exceptions, the products of group work on these projects has been excellent, even when students have been asked to work on a topic well outside their academic comfort zones, such as when a group composed of humanities and social science majors were asked to work on “Ice Jacking” a stub dealing with an engineering topic. We are particularly pleased with this project as it epitomizes the “learn by doing” ethos we embrace at Cal Poly Pomona.

While our course revision has had its share of successes, we have also had a fair number of drawbacks. For example, while the Wikipedia Final has been popular among our students, we have had difficulty integrating the trainings provided by Wikipedia into the course itself. Another challenge has involved Module 4, which addresses the Research as Inquiry frame. The original lessons for this module, taught during Fall Quarter 2017 didn’t really work, so we revised them in Winter Quarter, focusing on a real world research problem, in this case selecting and doing background research on buying a car. The applied focus resulted in far greater student engagement.

We also had issues with the 3 module assessments we recycled from the previous iteration of LIB 150. These assessments were based on the older learning outcomes, and focused on the previous final project. As such, their integration into the new course has been difficult and required significant retooling in order to work with the new course focus.

Finally, (contradictory though it may seem) structure has also been a problem in our revised course. Under the revised model, Module 5: which addressed the Search as Strategic Exploration frame came near the end of the course, long after students should have begun searching for sources for their Wikipedia project.

We are currently addressing all of these elements in a second round of revisions for our course, as we prepare for Cal Poly Pomona’s transition from quarters to semesters in Fall 2018. Semester conversion involves a completely new set of challenges for us, as our 10-week course will be expanded to 15 weeks, requiring us to come up with 10 new lessons and activities. Retooling is already underway. Here, in brief, is what we are working on:

* First, after a year of working with our revised learning outcomes, we concluded that we had too many learning outcomes for the course. Our new model as illustrated in Tables 2 and 3 provides one learning outcome for each module, and the mapping between these course learning outcomes and the General Education learning outcome requirements are now explicit.

Take in Table 2

Take in Table 3

* Second, we are directly incorporating the Wikipedia trainings into the course with 5 of the 10 new lessons focusing on application of the principles covered in those trainings.
* Third, we have also reshuffled the modules, moving the modules dealing with research and search toward the beginning of the course, and the modules dealing with citation and source assessment to later on in the semester.
* Finally, we have revised all five of the end of module assessments, with new assessments created specifically for modules 2-5. These assessments build on each other, helping the students prepare for the final project while providing direct, specific assessments of each of the courses five learning outcomes.

**Conclusion**

The 2015 *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* states that “research is iterative” in that there is no single perfect query, theory or hypothesis, but rather that answers are found through a process in which discovered information is subjected to repeated inquiry and analysis. At Cal Poly Pomona, we have discovered that much like research, course design is iterative, with each new iteration of a course improving on the previous one as experience, assessment data and student feedback are applied to future course development.

We are currently embarking on our third iteration of LIB 150 this fall. For us, the Framework has provided us with precisely what it claims to be, a structure of general concepts around which we have been able to build our course. This structure has proven to be sufficiently flexible to allow us to shift and grow our course as we react to our students and their needs, while also allowing us to consistently focus our teaching on the key tenets of information literacy.

**Appendix 1: Presentation Handout**

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| **LIB 150**  **“The Information Diet”**  **4 Units – Area E General Education Course** | **Revision Timeline:**   * **June 2017 -**    + Ad-hoc revision committee established   + Module assignments made * **June-September 2017 -**    + Course restructured   + New textbook adopted   + Reading quizzes developed   + Wikipedia final implemented   + New lesson plans written   + Course uploaded to Blackboard * **September-December 2017 -**    + Fall Quarter test run (30 students) * **Late December 2017 -**    + Module IV rewrite   + Rescheduling Wikipedia trainings * **January-March 2018 -**    + Winter Quarter (2 sections, 35 students) * **March-June 2018 -**    + Spring Quarter (20 students)   + Revise Learning Outcomes and mapping   + Revise Module Assessments   + Alter Module structure   + Revise Wikipedia Final   + Write new lessons for Semester Conversion * **June-August 2018 -**    + Finish new semester lessons   + Revise extant lessons for Semester conversion   + Upload new materials to Blackboard * **August-December 2018 –**    + Fall Semester 2018 Test Run |
| **Learning Outcomes as of April 2018:**   1. Explain how information is produced 2. Identify where that information came from 3. Explain how the process of creating information affects its value 4. Identify the kind of information needed to answer a question 5. Find relevant information on a selected topic using a variety of print and online sources 6. Analyze that information in accordance with appropriate standards of authority in order to determine its accuracy. 7. Create their own information objects using the established standards for ethical use of information. 8. Demonstrate an understanding of ethical issues regarding plagiarism and copyright |
| **Examples of course documents available here:**  **https://bit.ly/2HuiHqS** | |