

TRANSFORMING STUDENTS' INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS

A RESEARCH PRESENTATION

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

A research team of course designers, librarians, and researchers at Northeastern State University have been working with students in the freshman orientation course to create and track the results of an instructional unit to help our students transform their information literacy skills. During this research session, we will review the study, interventions, and results to engage the audience in discussing options for student learning and research improvements.

Library and information science uses threshold concepts as a framework for educating students in information literacy competencies. Meyer and Land's (2006) work identify threshold concepts as those that are transformative, integrative, irreversible, troublesome, and bounded. Davies (2006) explained, "When an individual acquires a threshold concept the ideas and procedures of a subject make sense to them when before they seemed alien. It is the threshold concept that provides the coherence." The threshold concept represents the epistemic perspective shift King (2002) inherent in transformative learning. Our work is to help students grasp the threshold concepts of information literacy in their freshman year so they can use strong information literacy skills throughout the rest of their higher education experience and lives beyond. Based on principles gleaned from Baker's (2006) eight-year study on the effects of information literacy instruction with freshmen at another institution and Bowles-Terry's (2012) work on tiered program of information literacy instruction, this study has been examining the achievement of institutional transformative information literacy learning outcomes for undergraduate students.

The campus wide team began its research with students enrolled in the fall 2015 NSU freshman orientation course, University Strategies. The students completed a pre-intervention evaluation before receiving online and face to face instruction regarding selecting appropriate resources for finding research material and criteria for evaluating a website's reliability.

Evaluations ten weeks after the interventions compared to the pre-intervention evaluations indicated significant growth in students' (N=274) ability to select an appropriate search tools for finding research material. However, the same students were not able to discern between a reliable website and a fake one. Our results show that the 2015 fall semester University Strategies students improved their ability to select the most appropriate database for a stated information need, but their ability to correctly evaluate websites did not improve.

To track whether sequenced, transformative learning is occurring for the student participants, follow up evaluations were conducted with students one year after the initial interventions. Overall the study is uncovering a pattern of students' strong understanding that informations sources need to be reliable while repeatedly demonstrating poor skills for achieving that widely understood concept.

Two graduation learning outcomes for NSU students include being able to successfully evaluate the reliability of a resource and the comparative worth of various sources. To achieve these, students must critically examine their assumptions and beliefs about information resources, choose appropriate search tools, and redefine their idea of reliable information sources. Our study demonstrates that we are succeeding to teach some of these transformative learning concepts, while others need continued improvement.

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