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Collaborative Assessment of Student Learning: A Tale of Two Departments

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Collaborative Assessment of Student Learning: A Tale of Two Departments

Introduction & Research Design

Healey Library and the English department teamed up to assess the impact of library research instruction on undergraduate students enrolled in ENGL 102 at UMass Boston in Spring 2016.

Research Question

How does research instruction impact students’ ability to transfer research skills from one context to another?

Methodology

Quasi-experimental, as we could not randomly assign students to control or experimental groups; mixed methods, as we used both qualitative and quantitative data collection procedures.

Sampling

Voluntary convenience sample; participating ENGL 102 sections were volunteered by their instructors.

Hypothesis

Research instruction will increase students’ ability to transfer research skills from one context to another.

Instruments

Booklet, rubric (to evaluate the booklet), pre-test, post-test.

Participation & Data Collection

- 10 faculty and 24 ENGL 102 sections participated in our study.
- All 5 instruction librarians at UMass Boston participated, teaching at least one research instruction session.
- Overall, 320 students attended research instruction sessions, and from those 320 students we collected:
  - 281 pre-tests from students enrolled across all 24 participating ENGL 102 sections.
  - 222 booklets from students enrolled in 20 of 24 participating sections.
  - 250 post-tests from students enrolled in 22 of 24 participating sections by the end of the Spring 2016 semester.

Quantitative Data – Numb3rs N3rds FTW

Five post-test questions were designed to gather quantitative data and gauge student understanding of concepts covered in research instruction sessions:

- Select the research question from the following example that, in your opinion, would set you up most successfully for completing a five-page paper.
- To search for journal articles, the best starting place is...
- True/False: If you need research help, you should contact Ask a Librarian.
- Which of the following is most likely to be the best resource to quote in a research paper?
- To search for books on a specific subject, the best starting place is...

Qualitative Data – For the Word Nerds

Several booklet pages included questions asking students to reflect on what they were doing and learning. Two post-test questions were similarly designed to gather even more qualitative data and to gauge student understanding of concepts covered in research instruction sessions:

"I am reading student papers right now, and I have to say that most of them are using much better sources than in the past. And I used to deal with students saying they couldn’t find ANY sources – not this semester."

- Email from a participating ENGL 102 professor, 5/7/2016

Opportunities

- There’s Something About the Booklet: They were considered valuable by both faculty and students. This was both a blessing and a curse: students did NOT want to part with their booklets, even for one day!
- Convenience Trumps All: If you show students how to email articles to themselves, they will not necessarily write down the articles’ bibliographic information.
- Keep it Simple: Don’t try to assess too many learning outcomes at once! We only had 3, which still resulted in a lesson plan that packed too many things into too little time and a booklet that the majority of students had difficulty completing in class.
- Future Improvements: In the next round, we will break the lesson plan into smaller chunks, with instructional responsibilities shared between librarians and faculty.

Odds! We Won’t Do It Again AKA Lessons Learned

- Best Practices
  - Student Learning: Even when students did not identify the best answer for a post-test question, they often picked a good “wrong” answer.
  - Leading a Team & Project Management: Put together a large team with diverse strengths and interests; communicate early and often with your team; don’t call any plan to address more immediate needs. In one section, we noticed the students were doing and learning. Two post-test questions were similarly designed to gather even more qualitative data and to gauge student understanding of concepts covered in research instruction sessions:

"I am reading student papers right now, and I have to say that most of them are using much better sources than in the past. And I used to deal with students saying they couldn’t find ANY sources – not this semester."

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Everything is Awesome AKA More Lessons Learned and Best Practices

- **Student Learning**

  Even when students did not identify the best answer for a post-test question, they often picked a good “wrong” answer.

  Leading a Team & Project Management

  1. Put together a large team with diverse strengths and interests; communicate early and often with your team; don’t call any test question, they often picked a good “wrong” answer.
  2. Devise a Strategy; if the circumstances call for it, don’t be afraid to stray from the plan to address more immediate needs. In one section, we noticed the students were doing and learning. Two post-test questions were similarly designed to gather even more qualitative data and to gauge student understanding of concepts covered in research instruction sessions:

  "I am reading student papers right now, and I have to say that most of them are using much better sources than in the past. And I used to deal with students saying they couldn’t find ANY sources – not this semester."

  - Email from a participating ENGL 102 professor, 5/7/2016

LITERATURE REVIEW


- "Rubrics are often employed when educators must judge the quality of performances or constructed-response assignments. The use of rubrics is based on the premise that they allow evaluators to express more refined criteria than that of traditional rubric-based grading.

"In addition to educational and motivational theories, performance assessment has been used as an effective way to tax learning and understanding. Teachers may be concerned about the reliability of rubric-based assessments, given that they are not as strong, compared to other forms of data that may influence student success."


- "Quality educational program evaluation includes both summative and formative evaluation. The summative evaluation measures of skills and knowledge. The challenge is to create an effective rubric that requires the use of meaningful and complex performance expectations.

- Although many measurement validation measures have been developed, there is currently no definitive approach to efficiently through demonstrated skills that are assessed longitudinally."

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