Library Department
Unit-Level Assessment Liaison Report
Spring 2018
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I. Department Buy-In and Outcome Definition

The library began assessing student learning outcomes in 2008, but what we assessed and how we assessed it have remained more or less unchanged until now. Updating our methods became more pressing with the advent of the 2016 ACRL Framework for information literacy. After revisiting our SLOs in 2016, we decided collectively to try a different approach. Instead of assessing several outcomes at once, as in past measures, we decided to focus on one outcome at a time. The advantages of this approach are multiple. The singular assessments allow us to spend more time on individual concepts, they help ensure that students who receive library instruction at three different times are exposed to different concepts, and they will take less time to administer. In order to make such a change, we decided to tie individual SLO instruction to specific courses.

Creating a new assessment practice was not always easy, and doing so required two face to face meetings as well as a number of group emails. There was some confusion over which tools we were going to use, when we would administer them, and what the scoring rubrics would look like. However, the key seems to be keeping clear lines of communication up and welcoming the input of all department members.

Working in our favor, the library has a long history of assessment, including two full-time librarians and one adjunct librarian who currently serve or have served on the assessment committee in the past. Thus, buy-in was easy to establish. Librarians Katie Karlin and Caterina Mazzotta reviewed departmental outcomes and noted areas of overlap between our outcomes and other departments'. Inspired by their work, the rest of the librarians met and decided that we would include a lesson on the concept of authority in all College Success classes, additional instruction of keywords in Speech 101 classes, and extra work with Boolean operators in English 102 classes. These tools will assess outcomes 1,2, and 4 below:

1. Identify key concepts and terms (keywords, synonyms and related terms) that describe the information they seek.
2. Construct search strategies using appropriate commands, including Boolean operators.
3. Retrieve information in a variety of formats using various information resources.
4. Evaluate sources for authority, credibility and currency.
5. Recognize the legal and ethical importance of citations and cite information accordingly.

II. Assessment Research and Design

The Boolean operators tool proposes a research scenario and supplies keywords for students to use to construct efficient search strategies. This tool assesses student learning of the 2nd library outcome:

Construct search strategies using appropriate commands, including Boolean operators.

Library Instruction Assessment
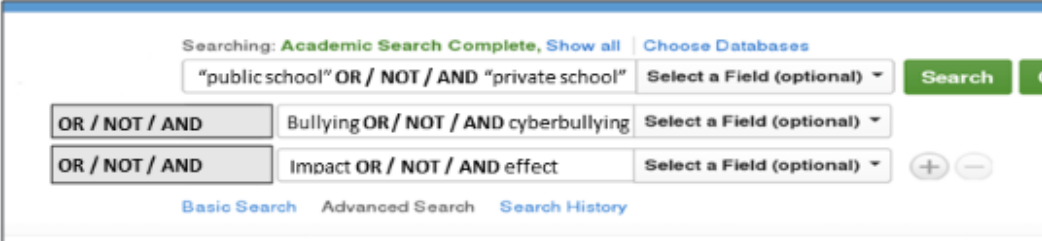
ENGLISH 102: Boolean Operators

Scenario:

Your professor has asked you to write a research paper about the impact of bullying in public high schools. Your assignment limits your discussion to public high schools and on-campus bullying, so finding information about cyberbullying is unnecessary.

Applied Skill:

Use the Boolean operators AND, OR, and NOT to connect the following search terms in a way that will return the largest number of relevant results.

Instructions:

Circle the best Boolean Operator to use at each position:

Figure 1

This tool assesses students' understanding of Boolean logic by asking them to choose the most appropriate sequence of commands for relevancy. Since the parameters of the assignment dictate that students neither report results for cyberbullying nor for private schools, they should eliminate those keywords with NOT. This does not mean that students will never find useful information about public schools in an article that also mentions private schools. For instance, students may find useful comparative data in an article that contains both types of school. Rather, the question attempts to get students to clarify the logic on which library databases are built.

When we pilot this tool in summer 2018 we will score it with a grading key that looks, without nuance, at the best search terms according to the logic. Those answers are:

Not
And

Not
And
Or

The keyword generation assessment tool assesses student learning of the 1st outcome:

Identify key concepts and terms (keywords, synonyms and related terms) that describe the information they seek.

With this tool we ask students to take a typical research question and use it to generate keywords for a viable search. The search terms are intentionally vague to encourage students to focus their thinking and search for precise keywords and descriptors.

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Directions:
1. Read the following research question.
2. Circle the keywords/keyword phrases.
3. Write the keywords at the top of the column.
4. Provide two (2) synonyms or related concepts for each keyword.

Question:

How can community colleges assist students to overcome obstacles in order to find success?

Keywords:

Keyword from Question			
Synonym/ Related Concept 1			
Synonym/ Related Concept 2			

Figure 2

Students will recognize that there are five possible keywords (or key phrases) in the question and will have to think critically about the best ways to distill those concepts down to three working concepts. After we pilot the measures we will be able to read the results, create a scoring scale, and norm our scoring before the actual assessment begins in the Fall of 2018.

The authority assessment tool assesses a part of the learning encapsulated by outcome four:

Evaluate sources for authority, credibility and currency.

Here we ask college success students to think about notions of authority as they learn which kinds of sources are acceptable for college level papers. We ask students to identify popular, government, and academic sources in multiple choice format (See Figure 3).

President Trump tweets about Chicago gun violence.

What kind of authority is this source? *

○ Academic

○ Government

○ Moral

○ Popular

○ Scientific

Figure 3

Because we recognize that some choices can be difficult, we offer students a chance to explain their rationale in short answer form (See Figure 4). For instance, in the current example, the answers "government" or "popular" could be correct, depending on a number of factors.

Why would you use or not use this source for your research project? *

Long answer text

Figure 4

For the record, this is technically a government source because A) The author is the President and represents that authority, no matter in which medium he happens to be communicating, and B) All of his recorded communications are archived as such. However, the argument could be made that the source is actually a popular authority because of the medium and the speaker's past role as a reality TV star. Beyond that, a student may argue that the numbers cited in the Tweet represent a misunderstanding of the actual numbers from January 2017, and thus should not be used regardless of how people have constructed the individual's authority.

This portion of the assessment will allow students to expound on their decisions and give us insight into their thinking. The short answers will be scored by different librarians each using the same rubric. After we pilot the measures we will be able to read the results, create a scoring scale, and norm our grading before the actual assessment begins in the Fall of 2018.

III. Pilot Assessment Tools and Processes

Though the assessments are skills-based, we also nod to the theoretical complexities of the field acknowledged by the 2016 Framework. This sometimes puts us at odds with faculty from other departments who bring their classes to the library. Some professors expect that we will teach only those skills that they think are relevant without realizing that critical thinking about information sources is a fundamental, if complicated, aspect of the skill set they want their students to acquire.

Moreover, by pairing certain outcomes with certain classes, a professor who expects a singular how-to concept may not be expecting their students to learn about a more abstract concept such as authority. Nevertheless, we plan to introduce the three separate concepts and their corresponding assessment tools in the aforementioned courses. In order to help bridge this gap, we have composed a basic script to introduce the concept of authority, which we anticipate to be met with at least a little difficulty from some faculty. This script (See Appendix A) is not a lesson on authority, which will be left to each librarian to craft on their own. Instead, it is a way to transition into such a lesson. We hope that by providing this script it will help librarians feel more comfortable introducing a lesson that some instructors may feel is tangential to their preferred topic.

IV. Administer Specific Assessment

We will pilot the assessments in Summer 2018. Review the preliminary data, synchronize our scoring, and then discuss if or how we need to change the tools. After completing a trial run and review, we will be ready to administer the assessment in Fall 2018.

Appendix A.

A sample introduction of a discussion of authority, as related to Outcome 4.

"Library instruction does not just cover the practical steps you need to take to find the information you need for your class projects. We also spend time asking you to think about the information that you find, such as who created it, who the intended audience is, and what the intended effect might be. It is important to think about the different kinds of authorities you will encounter in your research.

Authority is defined as the level of influence a source has in its field. Indicators of authority are publication type, author credentials, or topic-specific expertise. This may mean the difference between a scholarly journal vs. a magazine, an author with an MD or PhD vs. a medical blogger, or a first-hand witness to an event vs. someone who heard about it later. While these indicators are a good place to start evaluating potential sources, sometimes peer review fails, a relative newcomer produces evidence that an expert has overlooked, and a first-hand account lacks the precision a more distanced one could provide. Expert researchers maintain a balance of healthy skepticism and openness to new ideas, and recognize the importance of asking critical questions about who created information, how it was created, and for what reason."