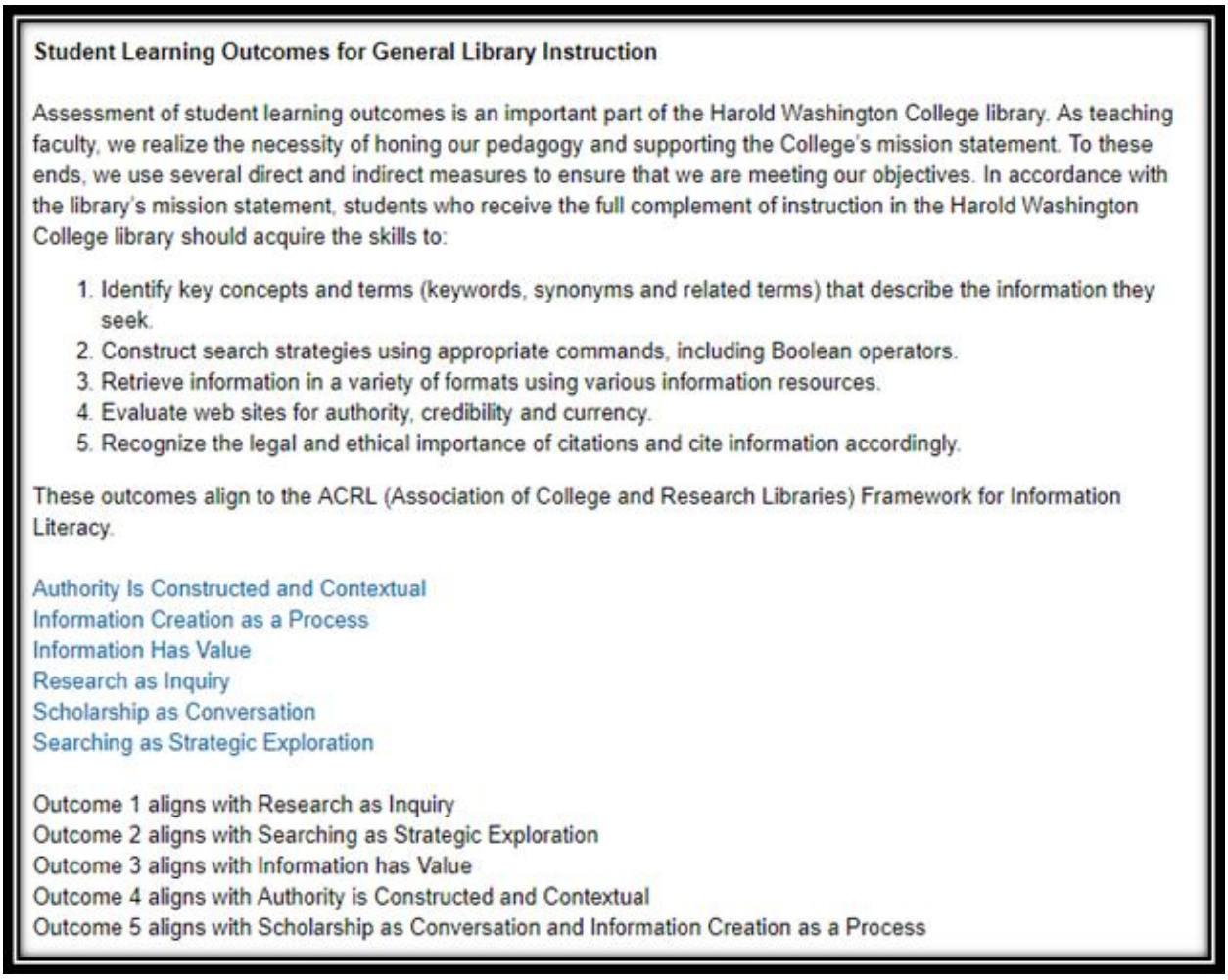
Library Department
Unit-Level Assessment Liaison Report
Spring 2019

Liaison Project Start Date: Spring Semester 2018
Liaison Report prepared by Todd Heldt

I. Department Buy-In and Outcome Definition

Buy-in to departmental assessment efforts remains strong. We remain committed to the departmental outcomes enumerated on our homepage:



Student Learning Outcomes for General Library Instruction

Assessment of student learning outcomes is an important part of the Harold Washington College library. As teaching faculty, we realize the necessity of honing our pedagogy and supporting the College's mission statement. To these ends, we use several direct and indirect measures to ensure that we are meeting our objectives. In accordance with the library's mission statement, students who receive the full complement of instruction in the Harold Washington College library should acquire the skills to:

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 web sites for authority, credibility and currency.
5. Recognize the legal and ethical importance of citations and cite information accordingly.

These outcomes align to the ACRL (Association of College and Research Libraries) Framework for Information Literacy.

Authority Is Constructed and Contextual
Information Creation as a Process
Information Has Value
Research as Inquiry
Scholarship as Conversation
Searching as Strategic Exploration

Outcome 1 aligns with Research as Inquiry
Outcome 2 aligns with Searching as Strategic Exploration
Outcome 3 aligns with Information has Value
Outcome 4 aligns with Authority is Constructed and Contextual
Outcome 5 aligns with Scholarship as Conversation and Information Creation as a Process

At the beginning of the semester, the librarians met to discuss assessment results from the previous semester, to discuss the tools themselves, and to exchange tips about teaching Boolean operators and keyword invention. All librarians at the meeting contributed in a lively discussion. After brainstorming ways to make sure the assessment tools were as user-friendly as possible, we discussed different methods of teaching the content. Some ideas seemed on

their face to be more intuitive than others; however, it is telling perhaps that no individual class in Fall 2018 significantly outperformed any other class on all assessed outcomes. Nevertheless, with new tools (see Appendix A and Appendix B) and teaching strategies in hand, we readied ourselves for Spring 2019.

II. Assessment Research and Design

Assessing library outcomes is an interesting prospect. Our assessment efforts have focused primarily on our single class sessions (one-shots), and because we are an academic department, we have strived to create direct assessment tools to put hard numbers to our outcomes. But because librarians often exist in a half-way point between an academic department and a support service for students, it is my contention that one specific tool might not be adequate to measure all we do.

Still, we felt that there was some external pressure to confirm our academic-ness, and so we built direct, skills-based tools to assess student learning. There is not a lot of research on authentic, direct, and/or skills-based assessments for library one-shots. Though the practice of measuring students in the affective domain has a long history, it has always been known or at least suspected that indirect measures of student perception is not the same as actually being able to perform the skill in question. In *Dangers and Opportunities: A Conceptual Map of Information Literacy Assessment Approaches* Megan Oakleaf (2008) looks at different approaches to skills-based assessment, such as fixed choice tests, performance assessments, and rubrics and found that all contained inherent drawbacks, ranging from lack of depth, time limitations, or expense. Given these limitations, it is little surprise that most academic libraries opt for affective and/or indirect assessments. In fact, for several years the HWC Library used indirect assessments to gauge library learning; however, while we ended up looking good on paper, we could not know for certain that the students actually *got it.* The assessments only described their beliefs about their learning or skill and might or might not have accurately reflected their skills.

After moving from indirect assessments, we crafted a fixed choice assessment that would be quick to administer, easy to score, and that would nevertheless attempt to gauge higher thinking skills. Ultimately though, the effort was disappointing for a couple of reasons. First, trying to assess all library outcomes after a single one-shot using complicated multiple choice questions was asking too much of librarians and students alike. In 50 minutes, librarians have to cover A, B, C, D, and E, and students are expected to grasp all of those concepts and then perform well on a multiple choice test whose questions might be confusing or bear little resemblance to the task that brought them to the library in the first place. Second, we could not find a good way to gauge partial learning of any given outcome. For instance, on question 1, A might be the best answer, showing complete mastery of the concept, but B might show partial mastery, and thus, should result in partial credit. We felt that ultimately the questions we were asking were too nuanced to fit within the fixed choice framework.

After that approach, we decided to do targeted micro-assessments, pairing specific courses with specific outcomes for measurement. College Success courses were paired with extra authority instruction and assessment, English and Speech 101 courses were paired with extra keyword generation instruction and accompanying assessment, and English 102 courses were paired with extra Boolean operator instruction and assessment.

III. Pilot Assessment Tools and Processes

We piloted all three assessments in Spring of 2018 and planned to administer full-scale versions of them in Fall 2018 and Spring 2019.

IV. Administer Specific Assessment

Assessments were given to students in the aforementioned classes over the course of an entire year. The Boolean Operator and Keywords assessments were pen and paper, while the Authority tool was online. Due to an unusual dearth of college success classes, no assessment results are available for that cohort. Over the course of the year from Fall 2018 to Spring 2019, 140 keyword assessments were completed and 466 Boolean operator assessments were completed. These measures were scored with two different rubrics (See Appendix A and Appendix B).

Fall 2018 Keyword Results

Class Summary	Finding Keywords	Finding Synonyms/ Related Concepts
Average	2.386666667	2.013333333

Spring 2019 Keyword Results

Class Summary	Finding Keywords	Finding Synonyms/ Related Concepts
Average	2.44292804	1.508436725

Fall 2018 Boolean Operator Results

	AND	OR	NOT
Average	2.27184466	2.058252427	2.058252427

Spring 2019 Boolean Operator Results

	AND	OR	NOT
Average	2.174193548	1.748387097	2.206451613

Disappointingly, even after we simplified the tool and discussed methods for better teaching these concepts, student performance stayed about the same (or even worsened considerably in the case of finding synonyms and/or related concepts). It should be noted, however, that the sample of keyword assessments comes from only three classes, totaling 66 students, in the spring of 2019.

V. Recommendations

One of the remarkable things about assessment is that it makes us think critically about what we are doing and how we are doing it. But another benefit of that critical eye is that it can help us understand why we are doing things, both inside and outside the classroom. In this case, it led me to examine the relative value of assessment to teaching, of the kinds of teaching we can accomplish in a single hour of classroom instruction, the kinds of pressure librarians can be under within the context of their employment, and ultimately of the different roles that an academic library plays in the lives of community college students.

Assessment is important, and anything that gets us to talk about what works or doesn't work in the classroom is positive, even if it does not bear immediate fruits. But the prospect of assessing information literacy skills in a one-shot session has always been daunting. Indeed, there is a reason there is not much literature about it. Dhawan and Chen in *Library Instruction for First year Students*, cogently sum the problem:

> Given that IL is interwoven into the entire undergraduate curriculum and that the total instruction time is 50 minutes, the foremost questions were: what can

> be covered in 50 minutes? How can it be assessed meaningfully? And is it possible to assess accurately without taking away valuable class time? (7)

Given these roadblocks, many librarians avoid assessment of one-shots altogether. Those who do often use assessments that are either indirect or of the affective domain. Because I always felt the data from such tools was less informative than direct, skills-based data, I tried to create direct, skills-based assessments for one-shots. Primarily, I wanted good data, but there was another component to that as well. Librarians are being asked to justify themselves in academic libraries like never before. In the past, the library was an assumed commodity. A large, well-stocked library and attendant staff of librarians was a given, even a bragging right. But as administrations increasingly question the value of libraries in an age where some higher-ups (falsely!) believe that everything is on the internet at students' fingertips, I did want to create something skills-based for that reason. But as Dhawan and Chen point out, and I have personally experienced, 50 minutes is not much time at all. If students are engaged in my instruction and ask for some deeper understanding about evaluation criteria or need more time to connect the dots on Boolean logic, 10 times out of 10, the class time is better spent on the expansion of a lesson than it is in the assessment of that lesson. Furthermore, when there is time to teach the complete lesson and to assess it, the information is often new to students and comes at them quickly. It is unrealistic to expect students to absorb it all in a single meeting.

Moreover, because we have begun teaching credit-bearing information literacy courses, we can assume that our status as an academic department is secure and can focus on the other aspects of what we do, which is more akin to student support. Because we have these two roles, we should embrace two different sets of outcomes, one for our academic role and one for our support role. We should have academic outcomes and skills-based assessments, but because we also function sometimes as student support, there is a whole world of affective domain information that we would benefit from measuring. For instance, knowing that students feel that they can count on us to help them, would be useful. So too is knowing that they know they are not going to be shushed rudely by a stereotype every time they ask a question. If they feel more comfortable in the library or on our website after attending a one-shot, that’s meaningful. If they feel more confident in their abilities, more sound in their understanding, more competent at finding accurate Because student support is important too. We are an academic department, but we are also sometimes a hand-holding department, a welcoming department, a you-can-count-on-us-to-help department. So, yes, skills-based assessments in the credit-bearing classes, but affective assessments for the one-shots.

Appendices

Appendix A

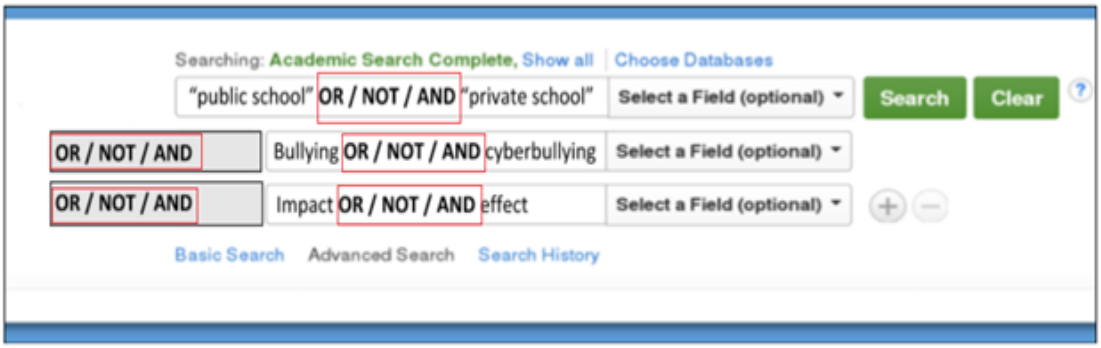
Library Instruction Assessment

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 correct Boolean Operator in each of the five red rectangles.**



Appendix B

Library Assessment -Keywords

Spring 2019

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 facilitate student success?**

Keywords:

Keyword from Question	Keyword 1	Keyword 2	Keyword 3
Synonym/ Related Concept	Synonym 1	Synonym 1	Synonym 1
Synonym/ Related Concept	Synonym 2	Synonym 2	Synonym 2

Appendix C

Keyword Rubric

Speech 101 Keywords			
Outcome	1	2	3
Find Keywords	Student found no keywords or so many that a search would retrieve no useful results	Student found too few or too many keywords, resulting in an inefficient search.	Student found keywords resulting in a thorough but specific search.
List synonyms	Student proposes no synomyms or innacurate synonyms	Student proposes a mix of accurate and inaccurate synomyms	Student proposes accurate synomyms

Appendix D

Boolean Operator Rubric

Eng 102	Search Strategy		
Outcome	1	2	3
	Demonstrated no or poor understanding of the Operator	Demonstrated rudimentary or somewhat confused understanding of the Operator	Demonstrated clear understanding of proper use of the Opertor
AND			
OR			
NOT			

Works Consulted

Chen, D and Dhawan, A. (2014) . Library instruction for first year students. https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1282&context=cc_pubs

Oakleaf, M. (2008). Dangers and opportunities: A conceptual map of information literacy assessment approaches. http://meganoakleaf.info/dangersopportunities.pdf