The Peer Workshop: 
A Faculty-Centered Approach to 
Collaborative Assignment Design

Adam Balciunas (& Andrea Baer) 
King’s College (PA)
Overview

- Background
- Workshop design & delivery
- Feedback
Background: Local Context

- Renewed emphasis on outreach
  - Two new librarians
  - Support of Director

- Recent successful collaborations with faculty

- Culture conducive to ongoing professional development
Workshop Goals

- Identify common challenges related to student research assignments

- Provide participants with an easy to follow process for strengthening the IL component of research assignments and give them an opportunity to apply the process on a specific assignment

- Facilitate peer-to-peer conversation about IL and assignment design. Provide a safe haven for faculty to talk shop.
Common Challenges with Student Research

Quality and relevance of sources

Little critical evaluation of sources

Sources “plopped” into assignment, limited critical analysis

Little distinction made between sources and students’ own ideas

“Satisficing”

Vague topics

Poorly defined and unoriginal theses

Plagiarism and citation
“Most students still believe research is simply gathering some sources almost at random, taking a quote from this source, one from another, and so on, and then stringing them together with some loose transitions. In my twenty years as a librarian I cannot count the number of times a student has told me, ‘I just need three (or four or five) sources on topic x,’ and they take the first three or four or five they find. They are not at all concerned about a theme or thesis.”

The Process

- Participants selected a real assignment to revise.
- Participants completed an *Assignment Design Planning Worksheet* prior to workshop.
- *Tips* handout and discussion reinforced process-oriented approach of worksheet.
- Plenty of time for discussion with peers.
The Process

Tips for Assignment Design → Worksheet Questions

- Identify IL-related Learning Goals → #1-4
- Clarify Expectations
- Scaffold the Assignment → #5-7
- Devote class time to assignment
- Provide Assessment Criteria → #8
- Test the Assignment → #9
- Collaborate with Librarians

Tips adapted from the handout "Tips for Designing Library Research Assignments" developed by Sarah McDaniel, of the Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries.
Small Group Discussions

Review each assignment, and provide one another with feedback. Throughout this process, make note of recurring questions or themes that arise for your group.

- Allocate about 3 minutes for each person to briefly introduce their assignment to the other group members and to share: the strengths, areas for improvement, and questions/concerns related to the assignment.

- Allocate about 10 minutes for discussion of each person’s assignment.

- At the end of this process, identify one element from one of the assignments that demonstrates an effective approach to facilitating the research process. Please be prepared to share this example with the entire group.
Common Revisions

- More detailed expectations and assessment criteria
- Annotated bibliography requirement
- Lists of acceptable journals
- Suggested topics
- More opportunities for feedback
- Examples (of a good annotation, of a good thesis statement, of a scholarly journal, etc.)
Sample Feedback

What aspects of this workshop did you find most useful?

“Interaction/Discussion w/ colleagues – especially helpful that colleagues came from different disciplines”

“Common challenges. Discussion & feedback. Thinking through the assignment was valuable.”

“Discussion in small groups about specific assignments.”
The Process of Bridge Building: Strategies for Collaborating with Faculty

Marcia Rapchak, Duquesne University
Creating a Partnership

- Background of Duquesne experience
- Examples from one faculty-librarian collaboration
- Take away points
Background: Changes in 2011

Course moved from Mathematics and Computer Science Department to the English Department

New hire
Background: Support from Important People

Diana Sasso

Dr. Greg Barnhisel

Dr. Laverna Saunders

Dr. Evan Stoddard

Dean Swindal
Background: Stage is Set

- Learning communities offer perfect pilot opportunity
- One learning community director (Personae) taught UCOR 030 and UCOR 101 – Ava Cipri
Collaboration

Identified shared learning goals

- Students will find scholarly resources independently.
- Students will evaluate information to find the best sources for a topic.
- Students will integrate and cite information sources appropriately.
- Students will use relevant sources that complement and complicate their own ideas.
Collaboration

Adapted similar assignments to create scaffolding opportunities

- Draft annotated bibliography
- Formal annotated bibliography
- Final paper
Collaboration

Participated in team teaching
Results

**Successful Completion of Objectives**

UCOR 030 - Annotated Bibliography

- Finding: 100%
- Evaluating: 60%
- Citing: 80%
- Using: 70%

UCOR 101 - Proposal Paper

- Finding: 90%
- Citing and Integrating: 75%
- Using: 85%

% of Students
Results

- Students in UCOR 101-C efficiently found relevant sources during classes held in the computer labs; high utilization of Gumberg’s databases
- Course assistant noted more engagement in UCOR 030-C than in other UCOR 030 courses
- All students in post-class survey rated themselves as average or above in finding scholarly sources
- All groups listed CARS as an effective model in final reflection
Lessons Learned

- Be persistent
- Seek support
- Publicize success
Developing Your Own Strategies for Bridge Building
Overview

- Identify barriers to collaborating with faculty
- Brainstorm methods of overcoming barriers
- Identify ways to collaborate on info lit assignments

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Task

List all the barriers to collaboration you face when working with faculty.

Try to think of any and all that may exist.
Barriers from Faculty

Prof. Shewmake

Portrait by Hubert Andrew Freeth

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Institutional Barriers

University of Otago (Courtesy of Ulrich Lange, Dunedin, New Zealand [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons)
Overcoming Barriers

- Faculty
- Librarian
- Institution
Collaborating to Create Information-Literacy Friendly Assignments

- Make a pitch that highlights benefits to them / their students
- Provide examples
- Work within faculty course goals
- Respect their time
- Be patient
- Relate IL to institutional learning goals
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**Tips for Assignment Design**

www.kings.libguides.com/assignmentdesign

- **Identify Learning Goals** Related to the Research Process.
  What research skills would you like students to develop through the assignment? How will the learning goals and their importance be communicated in the assignment?

- **Be Clear about Your Expectations.**
  Your students may not have prior experience with academic research and resources, so clear and explicit assignment guidelines are essential. State (in writing) the assignment's purpose and the role of research in it. Also provide details such as assignment length, acceptable types of sources, specific resources for locating appropriate sources, and citation format. Define terminology which may be unclear to students, such as "database" or "peer reviewed." It may also be valuable to discuss how research is produced and disseminated in your discipline and how you expect your students to participate in academic discourse in the context of your class.

- **Scaffold** the Assignment.
  Breaking a complex research assignment down into a sequence of smaller, more manageable parts has a number of benefits: it models how to approach a research question and how to manage time effectively, it gives students the opportunity to focus on and master key research skills, it provides opportunities for feedback, and it can be an effective deterrent to plagiarism.

- **Devote Class Time to Discussion of the Assignment in Progress.**
  Periodic discussions in class can help students reflect on the research process and its importance, encourage questions, and help students develop a sense that what they are doing is a transferable process that they can use for other assignments.

- **Provide Clear Criteria for Assessment.**
  Make explicit how the assignment will be evaluated. This criteria should align with your expectations for the assignment.

  Rubrics can be effective for communicating assessment criteria to students. (The AAC&U Information Literacy VALUE Rubric offers one framework for evaluating research assignments.)

- **Test Your Assignment.**
  In testing an assignment yourself, you may uncover practical roadblocks to conducting the research (e.g., too few copies of a book for too many students, a source is no longer available online). Librarians can help with this process (e.g., suggest strategies for mitigating roadblocks, place books on reserve, suggest other resources, design customized supporting materials like handouts or web pages).

- **Collaborate with Librarians.**
  Librarians can help you design an effective research assignment. We also offer library instruction that is tailored to your students and their assignments. Email us at askalibrarian@kings.edu.

Adapted from the handout "Tips for Designing Library Research Assignments" developed by Sarah McDaniel, of the Univ. of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries. Many thanks to her for permission to reuse this resource.
This worksheet will help guide you through developing your research assignment. It includes questions to consider when designing and/or revising your research assignment. If needed use a separate piece of paper.

For a basic explanation of the concept of information literacy, please see “Information Literacy in a Nutshell,” located on the final page of this handout. For more on designing research assignments visit kings.libguides.com/assignmentdesign.

1. **Course-related learning objectives:** What should students learn through completion of this assignment? (When articulating these goals, consider how the assignment’s learning objectives reflect the overall course objectives.)

   *Learning objective examples:*
   - Articulate specific literary techniques used in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* and their role in the representation of a prevalent theme evident within the play (e.g., betrayal, truth, integrity, female/male gender roles).
   - Develop an original and argumentative thesis statement on a topic of importance to the mental health care profession.

2. **Information literacy (IL) components and skills:** On the students’ assignment handout, underline or any portions of the assignment that reflect the use of research and information literacy skills. After doing this, respond to the following:
   - What components of the assignment involve information literacy (IL) skills?
   - What specific abilities and/or knowledge relevant to IL will students need in order to complete the assignment? (e.g., identify a research topic, determine a research question, design an effective research strategy, locate scholarly articles on a given topic)

3. **Learning objectives:** In light of your responses to #1 and #2, what are your IL learning objectives for this assignment? (Note: The level of specificity provided in the learning objectives will depend largely upon the nature of the assignment. Assignments for higher-level courses may involve less directed guidance and therefore more general learning objectives than do assignments for students with minimal knowledge of the research process.)

   *Examples:*
   - Apply effective search strategies in the database Academic Search Premier in order to locate relevant sources on a specific topic relevant to U.S. environmental policy.
   - Evaluate the credibility and relevance of websites in order to determine their usefulness for writing an informative paper about a controversial issue.
   - Analyze and synthesize information gathered from various relevant sources in order to relate your argument to other discussions and publications on the research topic.
4. **Communication of learning objectives:** How are the IL objectives communicated in the assignment?  
   *(e.g., explicitly written learning goals, specific details in assignment directions)*

5. **Student process:** What process will students need to go through in order to complete the assignment successfully? What information from the assignment will help guide students through the process? Are there places in the assignment directions in which additional guidance is needed?  
   *(e.g., description of steps to take, suggested resources or tools)*

6. **Pedagogy:** What activities or instructional materials will facilitate the learning?  
   *(e.g., discussion of feasible research topics, introduction to specific research tools, workshop on evaluating credibility and relevance of sources)*

7. **Demonstration of learning:** What will the student produce as a result of their learning process? How will the students demonstrate their learning? (The assignment may involve one or multiple demonstrations of learning.)  
   *(e.g., worksheet on defining a research topic, annotated bibliography, article/book review, research proposal, information webpage, research paper, lab report, graphs/tables/figures)*

8. **Assessment criteria:** How will I know students have done this well? What details of the assignment communicate to students how it will be evaluated? (Note: Depending on the complexity and structuring of an assignment, it may involve a single or multiple stages of assessment. Identify criteria for any/all stages of assessment of the assignment.)  
   *(e.g., For a research paper, assessment criteria might include: types and numbers of sources included, analysis/synthesis/evaluation of information sources, development of a thesis which is supported by information sources, clearly articulated distinctions between the student’s ideas and those presented in information sources, and accurate use of citation practices and styles.)*

9. **Feasibility:** How feasible is the assignment as currently designed in terms of: class time, time provided to complete the assignment, instructor grading time, availability of resources (including information sources), and any other logistics? If there are potential logistically problems with the current assignment design, how might those be addressed?  
   *(e.g., If an annotated bibliography is part of a larger research paper, and you will not reasonable be able to give all students feedback in a timely manner, consider other options for guiding student learning, such as peer review and peer workshops.)*

10. **Questions/Comments:** Identify any questions, concerns or comments which have arisen as you have considered the above questions.
Information Literacy in a Nutshell

Because information literacy (IL) is complex, it can be difficult to define in a simple and comprehensive way. The Association of College & Research Libraries’ (ACRL) definition of IL provides a useful framework for articulating IL skills. As ACRL’s definition (below) suggests, IL literacy exists on a continuum of complexity and is relevant to all stages and levels of education.

Information literacy, according to the Association of College & Research Libraries involves the ability to:
  ● Determine the extent of information needed
  ● Access the needed information effectively and efficiently
  ● Evaluate information and its sources critically
  ● Incorporate selected information into one’s knowledge base
  ● Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose
  ● Understand the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information, and access and use information ethically and legally”