

GETTING FACULTY BUY-IN ON LIBRARY-BASED INFORMATION LITERACY INSTRUCTION

Cultivating strong information literacy skills within students takes a well-built partnership between the library and faculty members. However, convincing instructors of the value the library can bring to their classrooms can be a challenge. Case Western Reserve University turned to Credo to help tackle information literacy on campus and bolster dialogue with faculty members.



CHALLENGE

In today's information-based economy, strong information literacy skills are a key part of success in any environment, but college graduates are not developing these skills during their undergraduate studies and this is putting their job prospects at risk. In a research study from the Association of American Colleges and Universities, 64 percent of students expressed the belief that they were well prepared with the job skills they needed to locate, organize, and evaluate information, but only 29 percent of employers agreed (Hart Research Associates, 2015). The campus library has long been a hub for teaching and deepening information literacy skills, but not everyone on a college campus understands this critical role. This gap between the library and the rest of campus means students continue to struggle with research assignments and faculty members are often barely touching on effective research techniques in their instruction.

At Case Western Reserve University (CWRU), a research-intensive institution with 10,000 students, the Research Service Team at the Kelvin Smith Library (KSL) saw students struggling because of weak information literacy skills, despite targeted efforts such as personal librarian programs and partnerships with first-year seminar faculty. The team knew new models needed to be explored. But, how could they communicate the value of the library's offerings and teaching methods to faculty?

Brian Gray, Team Leader for Research Services and Chemical Engineering and Macromolecular Science & Engineering Librarian at CWRU led the team that investigated possible new tools. Brian and his fellow librarians knew they needed to find a tool that could both provide a baseline standard on information literacy instruction as well as be tailored to serve the individual needs of different

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—Brian Gray, Case Western Reserve University

courses and faculty members. Brian also notes the team was looking for a tool that would not require significant amounts of librarian or faculty time, would be accessible both in the classroom and online, and provide a way to open dialogue with faculty about greater integration of information literacy instruction into the classroom.

SOLUTION

The team found its answer in Instruct. Instruct provided a way for the librarians to offer standardized instruction to students and faculty in-person or online. The librarians then customized Instruct™ to meet the needs of specific faculty members.

“Our faculty were highly interested in having a program that can be customized. Collaborating with Credo allowed us to build content that is unique to CWRU, which helps our faculty maintain the integrity of their courses”

Of course, having a flexible tool that can be highly customized was only half the battle. What if faculty did not understand the value of the tool? It would be just another resource gathering dust at the library. Brian and his team knew that communicating with faculty members early and often was crucial to gaining wide acceptance for the tool and to truly having an impact on the information literacy skills of the students at CWRU.

The library team had some success with outreach to faculty members already so they built on those methods, including: involving faculty in the investigation phase of finding new tools, for example a team of several faculty members reviewed Instruct; holding library office hours in places where faculty members regularly gather as a means of cultivating conversations organically; and contacting faculty members a couple of weeks before classes start to share how librarians can help enrich their classes.

Instruct extended these efforts; KSL librarians can show faculty how they are able to assign practice or research projects before librarians get to the classroom therefore

flipping the class and using face-to-face time to discuss students’ work and challenges. The course materials are also easy for faculty members to use and can be mixed in throughout the semester when librarians are not in the classroom.

RESULTS

The KSL librarians have found that their work with Credo is helping foster relationships with faculty members and improving the information literacy skills of students. Using Instruct has helped the team to demonstrate to faculty the knowledge and skills the librarians can bring to the classroom. This can be a beneficial resource when working with faculty members who have not actively used the library’s services in their classes before.

The information literacy courses have also been effective in supplementing what faculty are already doing, identifying overlap between what the library can do and what is happening in courses, and uncovering new, more effective strategies for teaching research and information literacy skills. Brian and his team also hope the tool will lead to earlier engagement with faculty. “We’re hoping by just making [the courses] available and promoting them that faculty will be more open to having conversations before the class starts that semester to integrate the library more into the syllabus throughout the year,” explained Brian.

Most importantly, the tool has been valuable in information literacy instruction. As the economy becomes increasingly knowledge-based, strong information literacy skills will be more and more critical to graduates’ success in the job market. In the near future the team expects to employ more of Instruct’s assessment features, aiding their understanding of which information literacy skills students are mastering and which skills need to be addressed in more depth in the classroom, and increasing the university’s ability to prepare students for future success.

ABOUT INSTRUCT

Developed by librarians and educators, Instruct teaches students valuable information literacy skills while providing librarians with assessment tools to measure and report student outcomes. Instruct is ideal for institutions seeking to align information literacy content with classroom instruction, first-year experience, and other student success initiatives.