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Long-Term Evaluation
of Bibliographic Instruction:
Lasting Encouragement

There is a recognized need for evaluation of bibliographic instruction, particularly the long-term effects. This study of a semester-long credit course over a six-year period shows that student appreciation of such bibliographic instruction not only is high at the time of instruction but also frequently increases during the years after the course has been taken. Regardless of their initial reasons for taking the course, students find the instruction valuable and also recommend such a course to their friends.

LIBRARY INSTRUCTION PROGRAMS have a long history in this country, going back even to the nineteenth century,[1] and the increasingly lengthy series of annual bibliographies produced by Hannelore Rader indicates that the field continues to expand in the attention devoted to it.[2] The concern for means of evaluating these programs, however, is much more recent and, when it does appear, is noteworthy more for the lament at its lack than for the details of its success. As late as 1976, Brewer and Hills could observe that "there are few references to evaluation in the literature of reader instruction and until very recently they have been virtually non-existent."[3] In a similar vein, J. Martyn calls evaluation that area "rich in speculation but uncommonly poor in demonstrable fact."[4]

In recent years, what attempts there have been to develop effective evaluation methods have generally focused on quantitative measurement of brief periods of instruction, i.e., one or more course-related lectures, or pre- and posttesting surrounding a few hours of instruction. There also

have been attempts to compare the quality of various formats for presenting library information, e.g., lectures, hands-on experience, team-taught classes, etc.[5] In all of these cases evaluation of the instruction is done at the time, and the question of the long-term effects on student awareness and performance has not been considered.

A number of librarians have noted the need for drawing upon the literature and experiences of others in education for assistance and guidance in instructional problems, including evaluation and the theory of learning.[6] This would seem especially helpful in the type of library-use instruction that most resembles other instruction, namely, the full-term course in bibliographic instruction, particularly when offered as an elective and for credit. Yet here it seems the literature on evaluation is virtually nonexistent. Perhaps this is because many agree with the opinions of one instructor of such a library course who says "the assessment and evaluation of this is exactly the same as in any other academic course,"[7] without providing further details.

On the other hand, a number of librarians argue that user education is not like other courses, that it is "a skill to be developed, not a subject to be taught"; that

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the student "must learn how to learn in the future rather than aim at acquiring a body of fact-information"; and that "learning to use the library is a continuing process."[8] Such a philosophy holds that what is taught (and learned) is a philosophy, an attitude, a strategy or method of seeking information, and thus a quantitative time-of-use evaluation would be inadequate or even inappropriate. What is needed is an evaluation of the long-term effects of courses in bibliographic instruction and their effects on students' later academic attitudes and achievements. If a freshman takes such a course, how does he or she, as a senior, or even a graduate student, look back at its effects on subsequent work? Although subjective, such an evaluation would be more interested in identifying attitudes than in measuring fact retention.[9] With these considerations in mind, the author began a study to ascertain the long-term effects and the attitudes of students who had taken a full-term credit course in bibliographic instruction at one university.

In the fall semester of 1974, Morris Library at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, began offering GSD 199A, "The Library as an Information Source." This one-hour, one-credit course was listed in the catalog under the general studies core and satisfied part of those requirements. Three sections, taught by librarians, were offered that first semester, each limited to an enrollment of twenty students.

Since that beginning, the course has grown to the point that each semester the library now offers twelve or thirteen sections of the course; through spring of 1978, some 1,374 students have received a grade in the course. Although one department (the Center for Basic Skills) did for a few semesters require its students to take the course, most students enroll voluntarily for a variety of reasons. Most are freshmen at the time of enrollment, but there have been some students from all grade levels, including Ph.D. candidates. Instructors have been drawn from all areas of the library: public services, technical services, and administration. There is a brief, basic syllabus, but each instructor is free to develop the course as desired. The undergraduate librarian coordinates all scheduling and meets several

times each semester with the teachers as a group.

In the spring 1979 semester, with the support of the library administration, the author set out to test some hypotheses about the course that had gradually developed, and to try to ascertain how the course might be improved, in the opinion of its graduates. The first hypothesis was that the higher the class level of the respondents, the more likely they would be to appreciate the course. This seemed probable because a senior, for example, who had taken the course as a freshman would have had more opportunities to apply the library knowledge in a variety of other classes and information problems than a sophomore would. Put another way, we believed that over time, students' appreciation of the course would continue to increase.

A second hypothesis was that regardless of their reason for taking the class, most graduates would come to a similar appreciation of its value. Even if some students took the class merely for the credit, we believed they would ultimately value it as much as someone with seemingly better motives at the beginning.

Finally, we wanted to see if distance from the course would provide any different, or more objective, suggestions for ways of improving the course compared to those we received during the course evaluation at the end of each semester.

The author prepared a four-part questionnaire containing twenty-six items. Part I dealt with biographic and enrollment data; part II concerned specific reactions to the course, using a four-part scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree"; part III consisted of three open-ended questions about strengths and weaknesses of the course; part IV asked for suggestions. A summary of part II is displayed in figure 1, and of part III in figures 2 and 3.

Using computer-generated enrollment lists, we were able to determine the number of students currently enrolled who had ever taken GSD 199A. A total of 730 questionnaires was sent out, to both on-campus and off-campus addresses, of which 71 were not deliverable. Thus 659 one-time mailings were sent. No coding of response sheets was done, also to preserve anonymity. A

	Cumulative Percentage*	
	Agree	Disagree
1. GSD 199A has not helped me in other classes.	21.9	78.1
2. As a result of this course I am a more confident library user.	88.8	11.2
3. I would recommend this course to a friend.	85.0	15.0
4. When I need assistance in the library now, I specifically ask for a *librarian* to help me.	66.7	33.3
5. I believe my friends who have not had this course are less skilled at using the library than I am.	63.0	37.0
6. The course helped me feel more comfortable in asking a librarian for help.	78.9	21.1
7. As a result of what I learned in the course, I have helped other students use the library.	75.7	24.3
8. I use the library more now than I would have if I had not taken the course.	45.7	54.3
9. I would not like further training in using the library.	40.4	59.6
10. I have recommended the course to someone else.	69.5	30.5
11. I would be interested in an advanced library course if it were offered.	48.8	51.2
12. The course should meet more often than once a week.	33.1	66.9
13. The course should be worth more than one credit.	61.3	38.7

*For easier display, respondents' choices of "strongly agree" and "agree" have been combined, as have "disagree" and "strongly disagree."

Fig. 1
Part II

total of 169 questionnaires was returned, for a 25.64 percent response rate.*

Students' ages at the time of response ranged from 18 to 35, with a mean of 21.4; most were between 19 and 23. Seventy-four respondents were male, ninety-five female; 92 percent were enrolled full time; seventy-six lived off campus.

Most of the respondents had taken the course as freshmen and were now upperclassmen (table 1). Majors and departmental affiliations were widely spread across the colleges, with no more than 20 percent of the total coming from any one area; thus a good cross section of the university population had been represented by the enrollment in this course.

Although it is obvious that students in a class taught by a librarian will then recognize at least one librarian, one of the emphases of the course is that librarians themselves are a major source of information for students. Thus, it is gratifying to note that

*Although at first glance 26 percent may seem a low response rate, one should remember that this was a one-time mailing without follow-up; the subject was not itself of great importance to students; students in general present difficulties for mail delivery because of frequent address changes and the possible vagaries of campus mail service.

some two-thirds of the respondents now specifically ask for a librarian when they need help. In addition, they acknowledge a need to distinguish between librarians and nonprofessional library staff when seeking assistance. Closely related to this distinction is the often-recognized reluctance to admit ignorance by asking for help. Again, more than three-fourths of the students from the course acknowledge that they now feel more comfortable in asking for assistance from a librarian (table 2).

In addition to being more willing to ask for help, students who have taken the course clearly have used their knowledge of library skills to help other students. Three-fourths of the respondents spoke of helping other students use the library and directly tied this confidence to their having taken the library course. Moreover, some 85 percent said they would recommend the course to a friend (table 3). Putting thought to action, nearly 70 percent actually had recommended the course to at least one other person (table 4). Perhaps because of such word-of-mouth advertising, there have been more students wanting to enroll than could be accommodated in the course each semester it has been offered.

Although the most common complaint about the course is the amount of work re-

Please list up to three things you feel were major advantages, strengths, and desirable features of the course. [Note: this is an open-response question. For easier display the author has summarized the responses by grouping them into categories.]

Percentage of Respondents*

24.9	Taught how to find material
27.8	Learned how much was available in library
30.8	Physical layout and location of material
15.4	Hands-on experience
8.9	Index to periodicals
7.7	Classification schemes
8.9	Card catalogs
3.6	Handouts
5.3	Audio-visual materials
29.6	Other (didn't fit categories devised above)

*Total is more than 100 percent because respondents could indicate more than one item.

Fig. 2
Part III A

Please list below up to three things which you felt were disadvantages, weaknesses, or undesirable features of the course. [Note: this is an open-ended question. For easier display, the author has summarized the responses by grouping them into categories.]

Percentage of Respondents*

17.8	Time; class should meet longer or more often
13.0	Too much work for one hour
8.3	Not enough credit hours
18.9	Too general; not specialized enough
4.1	Teacher
16.0	Not stimulating
7.1	Classroom crowded
4.1	Classmates hindered learning
2.4	Tours
3.0	Readings
16.0	Other (didn't fit categories devised above)

*Total is more than 100 percent because respondents could indicate more than one item.

Fig. 3
Part III B

quired for just one credit, many recognize the quantity and value of the knowledge and skills involved in information searching. Nearly half would be interested in a more advanced course, and some 40 percent would like further bibliographic training. These results, combined with some of the comments appended to responses, indicate a considerable appreciation of the need for increased emphasis on major- or course-related instruction in which more advanced bibliographic techniques could be related closely to the individual's particular needs. The various divisions of the graduate library at SIU already offer much course-related instruction through lectures to classes. And,

TABLE 1

	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Grad.	Unclassified
Class in school when enrolled in GSD 199A	74%	17%	7%	2%		
Class in school now	2%	34%	26%	34%	3%	1%

TABLE 2

RESPONSE TO: "THE COURSE HELPED ME
FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE IN ASKING
A LIBRARIAN FOR HELP" (N = 156)*

	Number Agree	Number Disagree
Sophomores	38	18
Juniors	38	5
Seniors	45	12
Percentage of respondents	77.6%	22.4%

*Not every respondent answered each question. Although there
were 169 questionnaires returned the N (number) on each
table is the total response for that item only.

TABLE 3

RESPONSE TO: "I WOULD RECOMMEND
THIS COURSE TO A FRIEND." (N = 157)

	Number Agree	Number Disagree
Sophomores	40	16
Juniors	42	2
Seniors	51	6
Percentage of respondents	84.7%	15.3%

TABLE 4

RESPONSE TO: "I HAVE RECOMMENDED
THE COURSE TO SOMEONE ELSE." (N = 154)

	Number Agree	Number Disagree
Sophomores	27	27
Juniors	32	11
Seniors	46	11
Percentage of respondents	68.2%	31.8%

of course, some university departments offer bibliographic courses in their own literature. Nevertheless, the survey indicates a definite interest in more bibliographic instruction and should provide impetus for both librarians and other faculty to investigate other ways to help meet these needs.

In listing the three greatest strengths of the course, with no cues provided on the questionnaire (figure 2), students more often mentioned not only the knowledge of physical location of material (55 percent) but also the realization of just how much a library has to offer (28 percent). They also frequently referred with pride to their newly learned ability to find material on their own, knowing the assistance of librarians was readily available when they needed it.

Too little time and too much work were the expected responses mentioned as undesirable features of the course (figure 3).

However, an unexpected reaction was that of the 19 percent who thought the course was too simple, or too general and not thorough enough. Perhaps we have misjudged the students' abilities here. At any rate, we may need to reexamine the syllabus to consider broadening rather than simplifying the content.

The last class period of each section of the course includes an evaluation on an optical-scanner form designed for use in all university courses. Twenty-six percent of the questionnaire respondents indicated in some way that they have become more appreciative of the value of the course than they were at the time of the in-class evaluation. This response is in addition to the 20 percent whose opinion of the course hadn't changed over this time (and may have been quite favorable in the first place).

Overall, some 89 percent of the respondents agreed that they had become more confident users of the library as a result of this course. Breaking the response down by class level at time of response, we see that 84.2 percent of the sophomores, 93.2 percent of the juniors, and 87.9 percent of the seniors agreed with this judgment. These students clearly felt that they had gained a skill that was lacking in their friends who had not had this instruction (table 5). In responding to the question of whether the course had helped them in other classes, 68.4 percent of the sophomores agreed, 84.1 percent of the juniors agreed, and 82.8 percent of the seniors agreed. When asked whether, as a result of this course, respondents had helped other students use the library, 64.9 percent of the sophomores, 75 percent of the juniors, and 86.2 percent of the seniors agreed (table 6). Lastly, 50 percent of the sophomores, 74.4 percent of the juniors, and 80.7 percent of the seniors indicated that they had recommended the course to someone else.

In general, statistical manipulation of the data shows significant support for the first hypothesis, namely, that appreciation of the course would increase over time. In cases in which there was no significant difference between class responses (as in the confidence in library skill as a result of the course), the reason is that satisfaction was high at the time of the course and has remained

TABLE 5

RESPONSE TO: "I BELIEVE MY FRIENDS
WHO HAVE NOT HAD THIS COURSE
ARE LESS SKILLED AT USING
THE LIBRARY THAN I AM." ($N = 155$)

	Number Agree	Number Disagree
Sophomores	27	29
Juniors	31	11
Seniors	39	18
Percentage of respondents	62.6%	37.4%

TABLE 6

RESPONSE TO: "AS A RESULT OF WHAT
I LEARNED IN THE COURSE, I HAVE
HELPED OTHER STUDENTS
USE THE LIBRARY." ($N = 159$)

	Number Agree	Number Disagree
Sophomores	37	20
Juniors	33	11
Seniors	50	8
Percentage of respondents	75.5%	24.5%

high even as much as three years later when seniors look back at their freshman experience. This indeed is welcome and encouraging news for library-use instructors.

The second hypothesis turned out to be nearly impossible to test statistically. By allowing students to indicate more than one reason for taking the course, the questionnaire made it impossible to use statistical tests of correlation. However, the results noted above tend to support the conclusion that, regardless of the reason for taking the course, most students came to a similarly strong appreciation of its value. This is borne out by the consistently high figures cited in the preceding paragraphs.

Perhaps ironically, this strong satisfaction with the course made it difficult to ascertain any clear weaknesses in the content or method of the course. Less than one-fifth of the respondents agreed on any one identified weakness (remember that the question was open-ended; no suggested responses were presented). As noted earlier, the most frequent complaints had to do with the time allowed (one hour for one credit).

Although the results of this survey do not specifically support all the initial hypotheses, they do in fact support the goals and objectives of the course. They indicate that the great majority of students appreciate the value of bibliographic instruction as a formal course, that this appreciation remains high for years after the course was taken, and that this appreciation is evidenced by students recommending the course to other students.

Librarians who are involved in formal bibliographic instruction programs might take heart in these results and consider similar long-term testing of their own programs as one means of further justifying their value.[10] Though this study is hardly definitive, it is a beginning in an area that needs more and better research. If we believe students know a valuable course when they see one, we may conclude that courses in bibliographic instruction are appreciated by those for whom they are designed. We need to document that appreciation, and the reasons for it, in order to improve such instruction.*

*The author will gladly furnish details of the questionnaire and statistical tests used to anyone wishing further information.

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