

1-1-2015

# Is Flipping Enough? A Mixed Approach to Introductory Information Literacy Instruction

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## Is flipping enough?

### A mixed approach to introductory information literacy instruction

Though much of the discussion on flipped classrooms has come from secondary education, where it's generally considered to have been founded by teachers Jonathan Bergman and Aaron Sams, and from school librarians, there has recently been a burst of interest from academic librarians on how this approach might serve information literacy (IL) instruction effectively.

Two articles in *C&RL News* covered efforts at academic libraries to incorporate flipped approaches to IL instruction.<sup>1,2</sup> Much of this approach echoes the methods that librarians have been using for bibliographic IL instruction for more than a decade, so it seemed like a natural fit for Marquette University's Raynor Memorial Libraries to adopt a flipped instruction approach for our partnership with the English Department's first-year writing program. We encased the flipped instruction method within a larger programmatic shift in how we collaborated with first-year English classes and stressed the partnership librarians with instructors and students.

#### Implementing an integrated approach to introductory library instruction

Like many institutions, Raynor Libraries' IL instruction program focuses on partnering with general education courses, namely English 1001 or First-Year English (FYE). Due to the size and scope of the program, the curriculum and its assignments are standardized, though some instructors tailor topics or assignment criteria. All FYE sections use

D2L as a course management system, but the level of interaction in that space is up to individual instructors.

Until recently, this collaboration between the library and FYE was limited to a required "one-shot." Because of this, for some classes the sessions were marginalized as "library visits" and removed from the real discussion of the assignment or the point of need for research skills. For the librarians, in order to maintain consistency, a standard script and presentation materials were developed and revised annually by a subset of instruction librarians, which some liked but some felt constrained by.

Feedback from students and instructors in FYE showed they valued the library sessions, but they mainly took away familiarity with a single database and awareness of the library's link resolving software. These take-aways did not match the librarians' goals for the sessions, and with turnover in both the English Department and Libraries, there was opportunity to reconsider the format and try to increase the sessions' effectiveness.

To address these concerns, the library and FYE program developed a new approach to IL instruction for Fall 2013, agreeing that the key concern was maximizing students' interactions with a librarian. A two-pronged

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approach was developed. In order to avoid the disconnectedness of the “library visit,” an integrated librarian program connected librarians and instructors directly as partners in the classroom and through D2L to allow for collaborative planning of the librarian’s role in the class and facilitate students to follow up with their designated librarian throughout the semester. Instructors were encouraged to partner with their librarians for multiple sessions, in class or virtually. To ensure a minimum standard of library familiarity for all students, the requirement to devote one class period to a “research day” with their librarian was continued. Librarians were available for individual research consultations and questions via email from students.

To maximize the class time between librarians and students in classes that might not have additional follow-ups, a flipped approach to IL instruction was developed. A digital learning object was created for uploading into D2L course pages and meant to be shared with students in preparation for the first class with a librarian in order to offer a baseline coverage of introductory information.

### Flipping to max: Maximizing library instruction

Rather than reuse previously created guides and learning objects, we felt it was important to create a unique object that integrated multiple pieces of information into a coherent frame and (hopefully) kept students’ attention long enough to deliver the information.

The pilot of the D2L embedded learning object involved six librarians working with 12 new teaching assistants and their 17 sections. The learning object was created in Articulate Storyline by the library’s instructional designer with content created by librarians using VideoScribe and Captivate. The object incorporates the basics of a database interface, conceptual frameworks, and an interactive test space for students to try out their skills prior to meeting a librarian in class. Each segment of the learning object can be accessed independently, but a sequence is implied by their layout on the first screen.<sup>3</sup>

Most instructors assigned participation points to the object and required students to complete the module prior to their in-class library session. With the object embedded directly into D2L, librarians and instructors were able to view student completion rates, as well as their open text responses



Screenshot of digital learning object. View this article online for more detailed image.

collected through the Sharable Content Object Reference Model. This information allowed instructors to award points for completion of the object and allowed librarians to preview students’ facility with the concepts and skills. Embedding the learning object also ensured continued access and easy findability for students who want to review the material.

With many introductory elements of instruction presented and available for review, librarians had multiple options for how to direct class time. Many started by opening the discussion with questions raised by students’ trials with the object and then segued into more complex examples and sophisticated

search strategies. Some allowed for peer-led instruction, having students demonstrate or describe for the class how they began their search, and others used the time for higher-level discussions of evaluating resources, including how to find information on a news publication to help determine credibility and bias.

Unless discussion extended beyond expectation, every class allowed for independent search time with the librarian, who was available to answer questions and strategize on an individual level as a “guide on the side” rather than a “sage on the stage,”<sup>4</sup> a role generally more comfortable to librarians in any case.

The learning object was never intended to replace traditional face-to-face library instruction; as Bergman and his colleagues note, “the flipped classroom is *not* about replacing teachers [or librarians] with videos.”<sup>5</sup> Rather it was seen as an enhancement to the personal instruction as well as a tool to reinforce the learning objectives and be available for repeat viewing. In this way, the object is intended to level the playing field for all students, regardless of their expertise with research tools and skills or their experience with technology, by creating a common foundation before students enter the library classroom.

### **Feedback: Librarians and instructors**

To gauge the efficacy of both the learning object and the integrated librarian program, we distributed three surveys for librarians, instructors, and students. Librarians also shared their classroom experiences with us informally throughout the semester via email and personal conversations. Their comments to us indicated that their experience with flipped tools was positive, though how it altered their in-class sessions varied.

As planned, the learning object didn’t mean they could skip over baseline concepts, but it helped to solidify those concepts and build on them through the repetition of skills. One librarian noticed that class discussions were extended as she referenced the learning objects and the students’ responses to it. Because students had some familiarity with the

concepts, they had questions and spent more time exploring the nuances of the databases.

In a few sessions, the object allowed librarians to introduce higher level skills or concepts that may not have been possible without preliminary introduction of foundational elements. However, the incorporation of higher level concepts was only possible in sections where a majority of the students had successfully completed the learning object. In sections where students forgot or instructors had failed to assign it, librarians were forced to revert to an introductory workshop.

These experiences are consistent with the challenges outlined in existing literature. Librarians sometimes struggle to adapt the in-class component to accommodate and build on content presented in the learning objects.<sup>6</sup> <sup>7</sup> Class time needs to remain flexible, and librarians must be willing to change course based on the skill level of those students and their success with the flipped tools. Last, flipping relies heavily on a strong instructor-librarian relationship as the flipped model is only successful if students are motivated to complete the tools and are held accountable for their work.

Assuming students finish the learning objects ahead of time, the flipped model still puts more responsibility on the learner and, thus, face-to-face time should be a “blending of direct instruction with constructivist learning,” where “students can get a personalized education.”<sup>8</sup> These observations further emphasize the importance the classroom component of a flipped model has on its overall success.

The feedback from instructors was very positive, with instructors concentrating their comments on the availability and flexibility of librarians, librarians’ willingness to collaborate, and the role librarians’ direct contact with their students played in the success of student research. However, the use of D2L and the piloting of the learning object were rarely mentioned beyond interface and functionality.

From this we inferred that what remains the most successful aspect of the flipped

model is enhanced face-to-face interaction. We assert this was equally a result of the integrated librarian program's focus on relational experiences between librarians and students, and instructors and librarians. The learning tool allows for more meaningful in-class experiences, but a relationship-focused instruction program can more successfully incorporate a flipped model.

### What we learned and next steps

A good learning object strengthens classroom instruction, it doesn't replace it. A flipped approach engages students ahead of time so that they come in with a better understanding of what to expect and how it can benefit them. It does not replace instruction. In some cases, it resulted in extended, richer discussion by giving students an opportunity to find very specific questions or problems that they wanted solved during class.

Updated and course-relevant flipped materials are integral to the flipped model's success. While time consuming, creating flipped tools specific to assignments and course objectives, rather than recycling old videos and tutorials, helps to engage students and get faculty buy-in.

A good learning object doesn't call attention to itself. Online tools and learning objects serve to make classroom time more available for personal assistance and complex problem solving in research. In this way, the learning object's value was more apparent to librarians—who could adapt class time to the needs and skill level of the class—than it was to instructors and students.

For us, the integrated librarian program was a bigger hit with the English Department, and it seems that the perceived strength of the flipped instruction was the increase in the efficacy of face-to-face contact time.

This pilot was successful in introducing librarians and instructors to the idea of using D2L and a flipped approach to enhance classroom instruction and building enthusiasm for the continued use of D2L as a home for supplemental library instruction. Yet it is also clear to us that the ultimate value for

students in interacting with a librarian comes from personal contact, and digital learning objects must be seen as a means to that end rather than a substitute for it.

Connecting librarians to courses through the integrated librarian program cemented the library as an integral piece of the learning process, and the bulk of feedback from both students and instructors focused on the value of the connection to a librarian, with particular appreciation for the consistency of having a single librarian.

For librarians, the greater collaboration with instructors and the systematic inclusion in the courses improved the quality and depth of our work with students and our satisfaction with the process. The scalability of this model seems to have worked without trouble, and we will continue to partner with FYE instructors in this way.

In some ways, what we did is not revolutionary. In other ways, the approach has vastly shifted the partnership between the libraries and the English Department and has changed our impact on the campus to a degree that we've only begun to measure.

### Notes

1. Sara Arnold-Garza, "The Flipped Classroom: Assessing an Innovative Teaching Model for Effective and Engaging Library Instruction," *College & Research Libraries News* 75, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 10–13.
2. Ilka Datig and Claire Ruswick, "Four Quick Flips: Activities for the Information Literacy Classroom," *College & Research Libraries News* 74, no. 5 (May 1, 2013): 249–57.
3. The current iteration, including minor revisions, can be viewed at <http://mu.edu/library/lor/first-year-english/introduction-to-academic-research/>.
4. Jon Bergmann, Jerry Overmyer, and Brett Wilie, "The Flipped Class: What it is and what it is Not," *The Daily Riff*, 2013, sec. Learning, Innovation & Tech.
5. Ibid.
6. Arnold-Garza, "The Flipped Classroom."
7. Datig, "Four Quick Flips," 249–57.
8. Bergmann, "The Flipped Class." 