Vignette 10: I'd Rather Do It Myself!

Contributor: Christina Mayberry, Science and Engineering Librarian, California State University, Northridge, Oviatt Library.

Type of institution: University.

Instructional situation and audience: Many of the instructors for the undergraduate courses are interested in having their students learn how to evaluate sources. Sometimes the instructors have specifically asked for this topic, and other times I include it in the session because it is very important. The library's website has a section of its online research strategies guide that is dedicated to evaluating sources (http://library.csun.edu/guides/subject-guide/11-Step-3-Evaluating-Sources?tab=43). Instead of just showing the students the section and briefly reviewing it, I like to have the students perform an evaluation exercise so that they can practice using the criteria provided in the online guide.

Overall instructional goal of session: The goal of the instruction session is to teach students about finding sources, evaluating sources, and citing sources relevant to the subject area for their course or for a specific assignment(s) in their course.

Expected learning outcome for learner-centered example being described: Students will be able to:

1. Apply criteria for evaluating sources provided in an online library guide by selecting a website within a specific domain.
2. Determine whether or not the selected website qualifies as an appropriate source to use for an assignment in their course.

Learner-centered example: Students work together in pairs or groups depending on the size of the class, the configuration of the classroom, and the availability of a computer for each student. The class is divided into four groups so that each quarter of the class searches for and selects a website on a topic related to its course from a particular domain, such as .gov, .edu, .com, or .org. A list of websites from which to choose is generated by performing an advanced search in Google (http://www.google.com/advanced_search) in the “Search within a site or domain” box for one of the four domains. The students are asked to use the evaluation criteria provided in the online library guide (http://library.csun.edu/Guides/ResearchStrategies/EvaluatingInternetResources) to determine whether or not they think the selected website would be appropriate to use for an assignment in their course (or the specific one on which they are currently working). Because each category has multiple pairs or groups, I ask one pair or group to volunteer to tell the class what website they selected and walk the class through the evaluation process and their determination of its credibility. If the students have difficulty with any criteria (often the author is tricky), I will ask...
questions and offer tips as to how they might figure it out. Sometimes students do not always volunteer, but I have found that walking around the classroom while the students are performing the exercise often helps. I also suggest that they take notes either on paper or on the computer to help them while they work through the evaluation criteria.

**Reasons for choosing this learner-centered approach for your teaching:** I have found that students learn more when they can practice what they learn before they have to apply it to an actual assignment. Students also seem to ask more and better questions when they have to work through the application of concepts taught in class while the instructor is available to them. This exercise also shows students what online resources are available in their subject area in different domains, which they might not have discovered on their own.

**Joan’s musings:** We generally remember more about material that we have explored for ourselves than we do if someone just tells us about it. Being learner-centered means letting go and allowing the learners to explore on their own. While it may be a bit more chaotic a format and requires the instructor to be flexible and ready for just about anything to happen, the net result for our learners is that they gain more insight into whatever is being addressed and are better able to apply this newly acquired knowledge to new situations they may encounter in the future.

**Vignette 11: Setting Your Learners Free**

**Contributor:** Tiffini Travis, Director of Information Literacy and Outreach Services, California State University, Long Beach.

**Type of institution:** University.

**Instructional situation and audience:** This vignette applies to a typical college-level library instruction session in a hands-on lab. However, it can be applied to any instructional situation. For the purpose of this example, we will say this is a class of college freshmen and sophomores who are conducting academic research for the first time. This session is for a three- to five-page research paper on a predetermined topic. The students are at-risk and enrolled in the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP 100 program). This will be their only organized visit to the library for this course. They need to find five sources on an issue related to their college major. They determine the issue themselves. Some but not all have selected their topics.

**Overall instructional goal of session:**

- Participants will utilize appropriate research databases.
- Participants will analyze advanced features and functionality of a database.