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EKU Libraries and the NOVA Program: Collaborating to bring information literacy to first year students

Brad Marcum

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During the fall semester of 2003, Eastern Kentucky University libraries and the NOVA program for first year students initiated a collaborative effort aimed at achieving two goals: 1) better prepare the one hundred students selected to participate in the NOVA program for their career at ECU, and 2) provide those students with information literacy skills needed to function as discriminating consumers of information throughout their lives.

This article will discuss the creation and outcomes of our first year of collaboration. It will touch on our positive experiences and on some of the challenges ECU librarians encountered as we worked with NOVA faculty to create an information literacy program designed to complement the freshman experience while at the same time teaching basic information literacy skills in such a way as to encourage retention. It will also share some of our experiences to demonstrate the value of true collaboration between different departments of a university in positively affecting the lives of college students and thereby serve as a model for others who might wish to develop similar programs.

The NOVA program at ECU is part of the federal TRIO program, which includes the Upward Bound, Educational Talent Search, and McNair programs. As stated on the TRIO website (2004), all these programs seek to "help low-income Americans enter college, graduate and move on to participate more fully in America's economic and social life." TRIO

programs are not limited to providing financial aid, but offer a variety of services that "help students... overcome class, social and cultural barriers to higher education." Each of the TRIO programs targets a specific demographic, with NOVA specifically aimed at assisting first generation students in their transition to college life. As participants in a federally funded program, NOVA students must meet the following criteria:

- Is a first year, full-time learner enrolled in a minimum of 13 credit hours at the ECU Richmond campus.
- Be a "first-generation" university learner (meaning neither parent has achieved a four year degree).
- Able to demonstrate financial need (as determined by the U.S. Department of Education).
- Willing to enter their first university semester as "undeclared in major".

To ensure a high level of individual attention, only one hundred students are selected to participate each academic year. NOVA faculty then divides students into small groups of four to six students. Each of these groups is led by a more experienced student recruited and paid by the program to serve as a guide and mentor for the students throughout the program. This mentor-mentee relationship is a key component of the program and facilitates the acclimatization process. To make the transition to college as painless as possible, the NOVA staff offers their

students a variety of services including: sponsored tours, on campus activities, and instruction on university policies and tutorials to help them become more familiar with the ECU campus. NOVA also coordinates one-on-one peer mentoring, small group and individualized learning assistance, and professional academic advising.

ECU librarians' first exposure to the NOVA program came in the spring of 2003 when Kate Williams, the director of the ECU NOVA program, approached Carrie Cooper, the Coordinator of Research and Instruction at ECU Libraries. Kate hoped to develop a more immersive library experience tailored to first-generation students. Carrie was only too happy to work with Kate. Since the library was already in the midst of redesigning its general library orientation component, both felt free to brainstorm and be as creative as possible. Both sides came to the first meeting with different ideas of what they wanted, but both were willing to compromise and work together to come up with the best program possible. After a couple of such brainstorming sessions, the concept had matured enough that Carrie recruited four other librarians interested in participating in the program: Brad Marcum, Julie

George, Kevin Jones and Victoria Koger. After a brief orientation meeting, Carrie introduced the librarians to the NOVA faculty, and the nuts and bolts process of creation and implementation began.

We, as ECU librarians, knew from hard experience that students receiving library instruction should have some sort of assignment; otherwise they would have difficulty in retaining the information presented. We knew that we would be challenged to design an assignment related to their library instruction sessions yet still tied to the NOVA program and centered on their first year experience. After considering the situation, we eventually agreed that after the instruction sessions, students should write a one to two page essay exploring a career they found interesting. They would comment on their impressions of the career before their library instruction session and on how their attitudes changed after researching the career using search tools and research techniques taught by the librarians. ECU Librarians also devised the following "Learning to Use the Library" worksheet so students could use it to comment on the process of researching their topic.

Career Exploration Assignment
Learning to Use the Library

Choose an occupation that interests you as a future career. Research the topic, using the following information sources as your guide:

- a. One book
- b. One library resource that you've accessed online through a database
PAID for by ECU Libraries
- c. One FREE resource that you've accessed online

Taking A Closer Look at Information

	Comments:	Quality Rating: 1=Highest Quality 4=Lowest Quality	Ease Rating: 1=Easy 4=Not Easy
<p>A. Book</p> <p>Use eQuest to find a book about your career</p>			
<p>B. Database</p> <p>Use a library database to find information about your career.</p>			
<p>C. FREE online Resource</p> <p>Use Google, or any search engine, to locate information about your career.</p>			

The Assignment

Prepare a 1-2 page paper that summarizes the differences between each of the information sources you've identified in the chart above, and how your perceptions about the career have changed after researching the topic. Your comparisons may include an examination of the quality of the information, the types of information you found in each information source and the depth of the information presented. **Don't forget to tell how the information has helped shape your opinion of the career and the choices you'll make for your future!**

Initially NOVA faculty felt the librarians could instruct the peer mentors, who could then in turn teach their “mentees” about library services and research techniques. NOVA faculty believed this “train the trainer” approach would reinforce the strong role student mentors play in the program. The librarians, while understanding the reasoning behind this approach, strongly disagreed. After some discussion, the NOVA faculty and the librarians reached a compromise in which the student mentors would retain a high level of responsibility, but librarians would perform all library instruction. In this arrangement, the librarians would give the student mentors extra training so they could provide assistance and help guide their groups through the research process outside of the scheduled library instruction sessions. They would also have a variety of organizational duties such as signing up their students and ensuring attendance at scheduled library instruction sessions.

As part of the training process for the student mentors, the librarians organized a “get to know you” session, complete with food and drinks. To break the ice, the librarians introduced the much dreaded “Haiku exercise.” The Haiku exercise involved the presentation of Haiku poetry composed by each individual librarian describing their life and personality, followed by an exercise in which the student mentors composed their own poems and explained their composition to the group. After this activity, the librarians walked the mentors through the classroom exercises the librarians had selected for use in the library instruction sessions for the NOVA students. Finally, to wrap up the session, each librarian split off from the main group

with their three to four assigned mentors and interacted on a personal basis. The librarians invested a great deal of effort into making the meeting a fun and informal experience that would encourage a comfortable rapport between the librarians, mentors, and NOVA faculty.

Very early within the planning stage, it became obvious that one instruction session would not be enough to communicate the required information and provide a satisfactory experience for the NOVA students. Therefore in the spirit of compromise that permeated the whole association, the NOVA faculty agreed to devote two sessions to library instruction. The first session would teach basic library service and information literacy activities while the second would address the assignment and effective use of ECU journal databases.

The two activities settled on for the first session were dubbed “Who am I and what do I need to know?” and “Where am I in the library?” The first activity involved helping students to understand that everyone has information needs, no matter who you are or what you do. Librarians asked students to form groups and passed out cards with a single profession written on one side. The professions were wide ranging, including vocations such as truck driver, CEO of a corporation, mother of two, and graduating college senior. The student groups then put themselves in the shoes of someone in that particular position and tried to identify three to five information needs that person would have in a typical day. After brainstorming, each group reported back to the rest of the class. Using these results, librarians demonstrated the actual benefit students would garner

from becoming wise consumers of information.

Following this activity, librarians led student groups in mapping out the library. Using a white board, the librarian mapped each floor of the library, coached the students as they went, drew various icons for different departments of the library and explained their role in the library, floor by floor. The librarians used creative representations for the various departments as much as possible -- scales of justice for the Law Library, an apple for the Learning Resources Center, and so on. The artistic ability (or lack thereof) of the librarian often served as a point of humor the librarian could use as a means of building a friendly and informal relationship between student and librarian.

The second round of instruction sessions took a much more traditional

approach, relying on the familiarity developed from the previous interactions and the benefit of having a concrete assignment to enhance the effectiveness of the presentations. In form and content, the instruction sessions would be familiar to most instruction librarians, concentrating on research techniques as well as on how to use library databases and effectively search the web. A few of the issues covered include: Boolean searching, truncation and wild card characters, how to evaluate information and discern good websites from bad, and defining scholarly journals and their differences from popular magazines.

In order to improve our future NOVA collaborations and first year programs for students in general, we circulated a pre-test and post-test to the students to measure the effectiveness of our activities.



Eastern Kentucky University
(Pretest) Nova Students, Fall 2003

Name _____ Instructor _____

Hometown: _____ Librarian _____

Gender: _____

1	Never
2	Once
3	2-5 times
4	More than 5 times

For each item identified below, circle the number to the right that best fits.

Think back to high school:				
1. Did you receive instruction on how to use your local library or your school's library?	1	2	3	4
2. Did you use a local library or your school's library to use or check out books, articles, or other materials for your classes?	1	2	3	4
3. Did you use resources from a local library or your school's library to prepare a research paper or bibliography?	1	2	3	4
4. Did you use the Internet or World Wide Web to prepare a research paper or bibliography?	1	2	3	4
5. Did you use the library as a quiet place to read or study?	1	2	3	4
6. Did you ask a librarian or a staff member for help in finding information on a topic?	1	2	3	4
7. Did you use a computerized index or database (of journal articles or books) to find information on a topic?	1	2	3	4

Clearly list all of the steps you would go through in order to perform the following tasks?

8. Find a book in The ECU Libraries on the subject of earthquakes?

9. Find a journal or magazine article on the subject of earthquakes?

1	Strongly Agree
2	Agree
3	Disagree
4	Strongly Disagree
5	Don't Know

For each item identified below, circle the number to the right that best fits.

Do you agree?					
10. Everything is on the web.	1	2	3	4	5
11. A step in using Web-based materials for research is to examine the Web page for information about its author's qualifications and affiliation.	1	2	3	4	5
12. You must always document information found on the Internet.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I will have information needs for the rest of my life.	1	2	3	4	5
14. The term "information source" can include all of the following: phone book, journal article, website, map, video, and an expert in the field.	1	2	3	4	5
15. If I find information in an article, I can use it in my paper, and not include the article in my bibliography, as long as I change the wording.	1	2	3	4	5



Eastern Kentucky University
(Post Test) Nova Students, Fall 2003

Name _____ Instructor _____

Hometown: _____ Librarian _____

Gender: _____

1	Never
2	Once
3	2-5 times
4	More than 5 times

For each item identified below, circle the number to the right that best fits.

Look back at the Fall 2003 semester:				
16. Did you receive instruction on how to use EKU Libraries?	1	2	3	4
17. Did you use EKU's library to check out books, get articles, and/or gather information for class assignments?	1	2	3	4
18. Did you use resources from EKU's library to prepare for assignments <i>other than the Career Exploration assignment?</i>	1	2	3	4
19. Did you use the World Wide Web to prepare for assignments <i>other than the Career Exploration assignment?</i>	1	2	3	4
20. Did you use the library as a quiet place to read or study?	1	2	3	4
21. Did you ask a librarian or a staff member for help in finding information on a topic <i>outside of the Career Exploration Assignment?</i>	1	2	3	4
22. Did you visit the EKU Libraries website <i>outside of working on the Career Exploration Assignment?</i>	1	2	3	4
23. Did you use the EbscoHOST database <i>outside of working on the Career Exploration Assignment?</i>	1	2	3	4

Clearly list all of the steps you would go through in order to perform the following tasks:

24. Find a book in The ECU Libraries on the subject of earthquakes?

25. Find a journal or magazine article on the subject of earthquakes?

1	Strongly Agree
2	Agree
3	Disagree
4	Strongly Disagree
5	Don't Know

For each item identified below, circle the number to the right that best fits.

Do you agree?					
26. Everything is on the web.	1	2	3	4	5
27. A step in using Web-based materials for research is to examine the Web page for information about its author's qualifications and affiliation.	1	2	3	4	5
28. You must always document information found on the Internet.	1	2	3	4	5
29. I will have information needs for the rest of my life.	1	2	3	4	5
30. The term "information source" can include all of the following: phone book, journal article, website, map, video, and an expert in the field.	1	2	3	4	5
31. If I find information in an article, I can use it in my paper, and not include the article in my bibliography, as long as I change the wording.	1	2	3	4	5
32. I am comfortable asking a librarian for help.	1	2	3	4	5
33. I will use library resources to meet my information needs.	1	2	3	4	5
34. The Career Exploration exercise was useful.	1	2	3	4	5

After collecting the data from both the pre-test and post-test, Kevin Jones (2004) analyzed the results and made the following conclusions:

NOVA: SUMMARY OF RESULTS OUTLINE

NOVA students:

- Received more library instruction in their first semester at ECU than they did during their entire high school careers (p=.001).
- After instruction were much more likely to indicate that “a step in using Web-based materials for research is to examine the Web page for information about its author’s qualifications and affiliation” (p=.05).

In terms of finding books and articles on earthquakes, after instruction, NOVA students had:

- Less uncertainty (Don’t Know + Blank-No Answer) in their approach (31 vs. 16 books) (31 vs. 17 articles)
- A clearer sense of how to find these materials, as indicated by a greater number using the appropriate source, or by asking a librarian (Books: 30 pretest vs. 40 posttest) (Articles: 15 pretest vs. 28 posttest)
- A greater sense of “information independence” (“Ask a librarian for help” for articles: 15 pretest vs. 6 posttest).

NOVA Short Answer Questions:				
Earthquakes	Finding A Book		Finding An Article	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
Ask A Librarian	16	11	15	6
eQuest/Online Catalog	14	29	14	6
EBSCOhost/ Academic Search Premier	0	3	0	22
Blank/No Answer	11	16	17	17
Don't Know	20	0	14	0

Even with this newfound “information independence,” over 80 percent of NOVA students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement:

- “I am comfortable asking a librarian for help”
- “I will use the library to meet my information needs”
- “The Career Exploration exercise was useful.”

The results of the post-test indicated that our efforts had a positive effect on the information literacy and attitudes of the NOVA students. Although the results were generally positive, one disconcerting fact came to our attention. A large number of the NOVA students reported they had received little or no formal library instruction or research training in high school and that they had received more library instruction in their first semester at EKU than in their entire high school careers. This finding validated our belief in the importance of reaching out to first-year students to teach information literacy skills.

Many of the challenges that arose during our collaboration with NOVA were organizational or procedural in origin. Some of the choices made early on caused some problems later in the semester. Relying solely on the student mentors to sign up their mentees for the instruction sessions resulted in some confusion and last minute scrambling to make sure every student received instruction. Choosing to err on the side of student convenience, we offered four instruction sessions scheduled at differing times and days that students could attend. This approach resulted in an imbalance in class attendance, with some sessions overloaded and others scarcely attended. Additionally, allowing students to sign up for any of the sessions weakened the link we had worked to

build between librarians and students since many of the students attended instruction sessions taught by librarians they had not interacted with as much as “their” librarian. Looking back, this procedure should be modified to allow either NOVA faculty or librarian oversight to avoid the recurrence of these problems.

Once the semester began, librarians, NOVA faculty and students alike became immersed in the new semester. Burgeoning numbers of library instruction requests made for one of the busiest fall semesters in recent memory. Communication between librarians suffered somewhat as a result, producing a loss of conformity in teaching approach.

The amount of time that elapsed between the first instruction session and the second also became an issue. The first session took place early in the fall semester, while the second was delayed to the latter half of the semester. While scheduling difficulties caused the delay, the result was that some of the information and concepts imparted to the students faded from their memory over the long interval.

Aside from the demonstrated information literacy results, other key outcomes of the collaboration included the close interaction fostered between the librarians and students and the increased comfort level of the students with library and

research related matters. Creating a foundation of information literacy skills and giving students an opportunity to use their new skills to explore possible careers also proved rewarding.

The level of enthusiasm we encountered from NOVA faculty and students fostered a community of cooperation and both impressed and inspired us to do our best for them. Participating in such an endeavor

undoubtedly served as a good public relations tool that can only help attract more faculty and students to the library. From this beginning, ECU libraries have impacted the lives of one hundred first year students that we might not have otherwise been able to reach and have launched what promises to be a long running and fruitful association with the NOVA program.

References

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