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It's SO Boring: Improving Library Orientation Sessions For First-Year Students

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Introduction

Instruction librarians sometimes face challenges in planning and implementing successful one-shot sessions for students. Librarians understand the strain of assessing student learning for the university as well as the desire to teach every student important information literacy skills. The difficulties are managing limited time, uncontrollable space, faculty collaboration, and student motivation in order to develop and achieve class goals. There are a variety of factors that can lead to student boredom or frustration with the library. Library layout can lead to a potentially frustrating first impression with students because of their unfamiliarity with the physical space, library classification system, and the extensive online system. Therefore, a simple task of finding a book can be overwhelming for first-year students acclimating to a multi-million volume research library.

Latham and Gross (2013) using Keller's ARCS Model of Motivational Design note four conceptual categories that should be part of all instruction: "(1) gaining and holding *Attention*, (2) demonstrating *Relevance*, (3) instilling *Confidence*, and (4) providing a sense of *Satisfaction* (pp. 432-433)." With these concepts in mind librarians developed class goals of 1) finding a book, 2) knowing how to find help in the library, and 3) navigating the library's website to find an article. During the EDHE library sessions, first-year students were tasked with completing a worksheet with the librarian, listening and following along using an online database, and then going out in groups to locate books on the shelves. This paper seeks to find how current library instruction for first year students can overcome the problem of student boredom while accomplishing class instruction goals.

EDHE Course Evaluations and the Library Survey

The popular elective freshman course, First Year Experience (EDHE 105) requires students to attend a library orientation session designed exclusively for the course. Librarians work with EDHE course instructors to create class goals each year and determine the best way to meet the needs of the increasing number of students each semester.

At the end of the semester the students evaluate their overall experiences in the EDHE 105 course, rating the library orientation session among other activities required in the course. Librarians received these evaluations and categorized student comments about the library session.

EDHE Course Evaluations from 2012 and 2013 were coded for this study.

In 2012, out of 756 course evaluations, approximately 76% of the students' responses were positive about their library experience. The other 24% of responses ranged from constructive criticism to negative remarks or no response. Among the 107 negative responses, 46% of respondents claimed the library session was pointless or boring. Librarians received 2012 EDHE course evaluations mid-way through the fall 2013 semester. Due to the number of comments concerning boredom the library session received, librarians decided to immediately add a question to the library survey given at the end of each library session that asked students to define how the library session was boring to them. "Studying academic boredom is important because students who are less bored are more likely to engage in learning activities and achieve at higher levels; reciprocally, those who are actively engaged in learning and highly achieving are also more likely to report lower levels of boredom (Tze et al., 2013, p. 36)."

Librarians originally felt that students may not have been bored with the library session in the classic sense, but perhaps something else: overwhelmed with information, forced into learning, or underwhelmed in comparison to "fun" sessions such as Rebel Run (a football game activity that gives all freshmen the opportunity to run across the football field before the first home game). An end-of-year course survey required students to reflect on activities associated with their course which would undoubtedly invoke euphoric memories of certain "fun" activities and thus rank other required sessions as mediocre in comparison. Because of the feedback from EDHE course evaluations for 2012 and 2013, the librarians modified the library session mid-way through fall 2013 to encourage students to explain the "boring" label placed on library sessions. With an open mind, librarians approached this study to learn how to make library orientation sessions productive and useful for students while being efficient and meeting class goals.

Review of the Literature

Boredom originates from assignments or activities in which students find little or no value (Pekrun et. al, 2014). Pekrun et. al suggests a link to "student' perceptions of control" and their level of boredom. According to Acee et. al (2010) who explored students' perceptions of academic boredom in under- and over-challenging situations, it is possible for students who complain about boredom to actually refer to

different aspects of what they perceive to be boring. For example, in under-challenging situations, students may complain of being bored because they feel the assignment is tedious or useless. In over-challenging situations, they may equate boredom with anxiety from not understanding an assignment or not feeling motivated and giving up too easily.

Culp (2006) also suggests boredom can result from a multitude of factors and assessed boredom proneness by surveying 316 undergraduate psychology students to find connections with boredom and personality. Culp notes a significant overlap between the concepts of boredom proneness and the general dimensions of personality, though it is clear that boredom proneness is not completely explained by commonly measured personality traits (p. 1005). Culp goes further to say, "People with high boredom proneness tend to be less open to new experiences, less sociable, less agreeable, less organized and more willing to manipulate others during social exchanges (p. 1005)." Tze, Klassen, Daniels, Li, and Zhang (2013) agree that it is important for researchers and educators to systematically investigate the effects of boredom. In their study, Tze et al. test 405 students from Canada and China at urban public universities using the Learning-Related Boredom Scale (LRBS), an 11-item test used to measure students' levels of learning-related boredom (p. 32). Tze, Klassen, and Daniels continued this research (2014) with 144 university students to determine that over time, learning-related boredom, vigor, and absorption remained relatively stable.

Library Assessments

Mann and Robinson (2009) surveyed 211 university students and found 59% thought lectures were boring at least half of the time and 30% find all or most lectures boring (p. 253). Lab work and computer sessions were found to be the most boring, while activities reported as least boring included seminars and group discussion. As hands on computer sessions are typical of library sessions, these findings are surprising and discouraging. Mann and Robinson suggest incorporating less boring methods as mentioned in their findings to provide more interesting sessions.

Latham and Gross (2013) noted in their study with first-year community college students with below-proficient information literacy skills that "one of the biggest challenges is how to motivate students so that they are receptive to learning new skills (p. 430)." However, previous research by Latham and Gross led them to believe that some students at below-proficient information literacy skills "tend to greatly overestimate their information literacy skill levels and are unable to recalibrate their self-views even after taking an information literacy test (p. 432)." They further argue that it can be a challenge gaining and sustaining the attention of, demonstrating relevance to, and providing satisfaction for students who believe they already possess the skills in question. "Students said they would be likely to attend such a session if it were required, or if it offered course credit, extra credit, an opportunity to improve their grades, or food (p. 440)." Conversely, they

would not attend sessions they felt they already knew how to do, or that contained no personal relevance. The current study surveys first-year students from a four-year institution with varying backgrounds and college-readiness skills.

Fain (2011) used assessment data from five years of a pretest/posttest with first-year students using McNemar's test (a non-parametric test that compares two correlated proportions) to identify changes in information literacy skill development over time. The author administered a "Library Skills Assessment" developed at her school to first year students at the beginning and end of their first semester in college to find what elements of the library session were the least or most effective. "Books were a suggested resource in both English 101 and University 110 classes, but not required to the extent that periodical publications were. Given the one-shot library instruction format of 50 or 70 min, most librarians sacrificed in-depth discussions of the call number system in favor of a more basic approach that stressed writing the call number down and hints for finding the materials on the shelf (p.113)." The present study also asks students to locate books and understand the LCC system in 50 or 70 minute classes. Like Fain, librarians have discovered similar problems of trying to teach too many skills in one class. The current study still includes finding a book as part of the class assignment. In Fain's study, she notes that in two years where students actually conducted searches in the catalog to locate and find non-print materials in the library during the instruction session that the additional exercise improved posttest scores.

Jacklin's case study (2013) uses student feedback from library sessions with biology students over seven years to evolve instruction based on assessment. Methods varied over the years, but included paper workbooks and an online active learning module. "This case study is an example of a formative evaluation over a multi-year period. Formative evaluations are used by teachers to modify teaching and learning programs with a focus on improving student understanding (p. 6)." Jacklin discovered through seventeen series of data from three types of classes that students generally had more negative comments on the evaluations the first time a multiple choice assignment was offered. "Once the assignments were modified for the next year based on feedback, the responses on the evaluations tended to become more positive (p. 7)."

Gewirtz's study (2014) used three assessment methods: peer-to-peer and self-reflection to evaluate librarians' teaching performance to first-year students as well as survey instrument (student feedback) for students to discuss their class experience. The three-assessment method proved to be challenging for busy instruction librarians; yet, it was helpful for them to learn teaching tips from their peers or new technologies like Prezi or Poll Everywhere. The current study does not evaluate the teaching librarians, but a group instruction meeting is required before and after the fall semester to encourage discussion on ways to improve the library orientation sessions.

Barriers and Suggestions

In 2013, Robert Fox wrote an article suggesting librarians continue to strive for more technological inclusion in library instructional methods by researching instructional design methods. "If learning the tool becomes an end in itself, then it inhibits learning and renders the material opaque to the student (p. 10)." He further states, "It can be a very boring and tedious process for students to master even the most rudimentary research skills. It would probably be a mistake to assume that creating a computer game focused on the library of congress classification system would remedy this situation (p. 11)." Without specifics, Fox suggests taking a student out of solitary boredom by incorporating a cooperative aspect to learning where mutual encouragement can be a motivating factor.

Bell (2007) presents what he calls the "I already know this" syndrome or IAKT as a result of the increasing number of library instruction sessions that are taking place in libraries due to an increasing emphasis on information literacy instruction. He proposes student demonstrations as a method to not only better engage students in library sessions but the instructors as well. This idea brings to light an interesting question, is student boredom exacerbated by some librarians' own boredom? Allowing students to become actively involved in the session may be risky and lead to a less thorough library session; yet, the rewards of student learning and engagement according to Bell could be much greater.

Kolliner (1985) suggests that librarians should interrupt their own structured lectures during library sessions to ask questions and promote lively discussions to avoid or alleviate student boredom. Boredom is presented as a common symptom experienced within library instruction sessions. The author suggests different methods or strategies should be engaged in order to alleviate student boredom, though it should be noted that what works at one institution may not at another. Additionally, Kolliner notes, failures and successes should both be reported and discussed to better improve strategies and sessions.

Methods

A team of 5-8 librarians provide the one-shot basic library orientation sessions for all the sections of EDHE 105 each fall semester. A librarian schedules all of the EDHE classes to attend the session in September and October. For fall 2013, librarians scheduled 82 classes ranging from 50 minutes to 75 minutes over three weeks; for fall 2014, librarians scheduled 105 classes.

Librarians use the one-shot session to accomplish these three class goals: 1) find a book, 2) know how to find help

in the library, and 3) navigate the library's website to find an article. Librarians use a five-question worksheet to help students use the library's website to have a quick lesson on the library's discovery service database (to look up an article), the Ask-a-Librarian page (to find help), and the Catalog (to discuss all the steps needed to find a book). Then students are led on a brief tour of the building before dispersing into the stacks to find their book. In fall 2014, librarians had the option to talk students through a short video tour of the library, to point out key areas of the building, instead of spending time on a physical tour. After the tour (virtual or physical), students locate their books and either take a photograph of the book with their cell phones or bring the actual book back to the classroom. Finally, the session ends with a short assessment quiz used by the librarians to evaluate the class goals.

The Center for Student Success & First Year Experience sent course evaluations to librarians in their original paper form. Librarians coded 2012 and 2013 EDHE course evaluation data into excel spreadsheets.

Librarians used Qualtrics, an online survey management software, to create anonymous surveys given at the end of each library class. The survey asked questions in multiple-choice and short answer formats and was used each year. Mid-way through the Fall 2013 sessions, because of feedback from EDHE course evaluations, librarians changed the library survey to include the question "Today's library session was..." with multiple choice options of: a. Interesting and helpful for my courses, b. Confusing, or c. Boring. Students were only able to give one response. For students who answered the question with "boring" or "confusing", a short-answer question prompted them to explain how the session was "boring" or "confusing" to them. Librarians coded student comments and exported into Excel to compare student motivation over two semesters. For class goals, librarians used library surveys from fall 2013 (1,707) and fall 2014 (1,261) to compare student achievement over two semesters. The participants were first-year college men and women, mainly 18 or 19-year-olds, with ACT scores in the 18-24 range, attending a Ph.D.-granting research university with enrollment of approximately 20,000. Librarians analyzed survey results for students' abilities to achieve the class goals and also for their perceptions of boring elements of the sessions that could be evaluated for possible changes in the lesson plan and goals of the classes in the future.

Results

Librarians coded EDHE course evaluations from 2012 and 2013 for this study. In 2012, out of 756 responses, 49 were "negative boring," while in fall 2013, out of 1,199 comments only 31 were "negative boring."

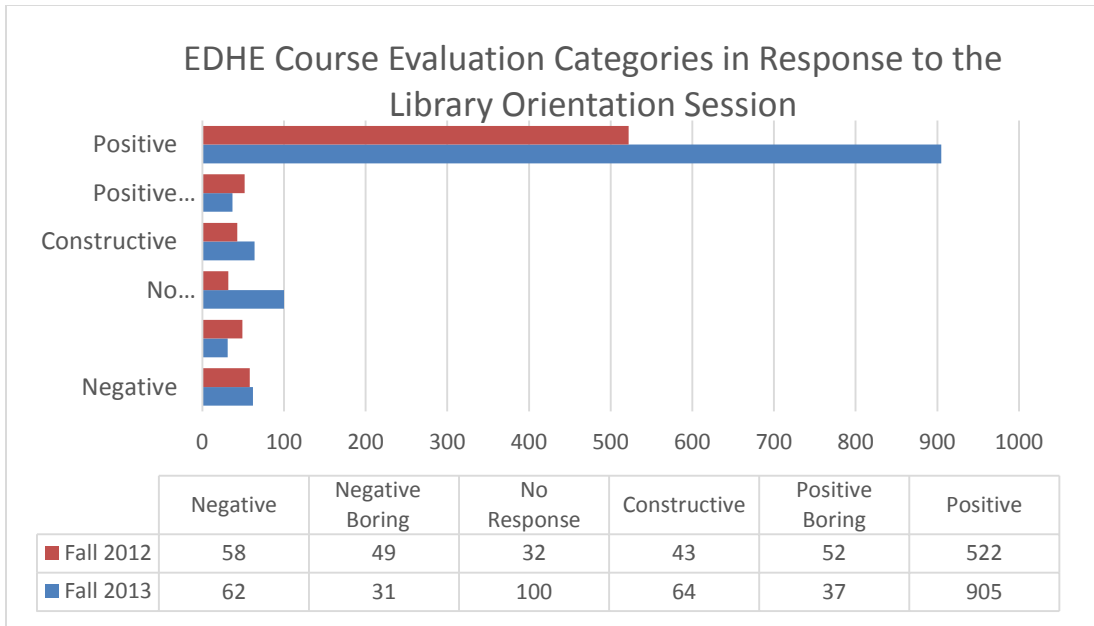


Figure 1. EDHE Course Evaluation Student Response Categories for Library Session

Examples of the types of comments for each of these coding categories for both years are provided below:

<p><i>Positive Comments</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> This was a very beneficial opportunity. I was able to learn so much about the library that has helped me tremendously.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I really like this because it helped me learn where everything was in the library and where to go for different things.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Very helpful and informative about the library and the databases. I used the databases for papers in my other classes.</p>
<p><i>Positive Boring Comments</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Fun but kind of boring</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Boring but helped me understand the library</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Helped us understand how to search books but it was boring and took a long time</p>
<p><i>Constructive</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Helpful but needs to be more interesting</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Helpful, but tedious. Mostly everyone has already experienced the library.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Good, but too much busy work.</p>
<p><i>Negative Boring Comments</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I didn't like the tour, it was boring and didn't help too much</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Boring all we did was walk through the library</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Boring and hard to pay attention</p>
<p><i>Negative Comments</i></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unorganized and useless</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I didn't learn anything</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Long and not informative</p>

Based on the EDHE course evaluations, librarians implemented changes to the orientation sessions mid-way through fall 2013 by including a new question to the library survey. Librarians made further changes in fall 2014 with additional videos and restructured the layout of the session. Data from 2013 course evaluations consisted of 79% positive comments and only 33% of negative comments mentioned boredom; in 2012, positive comments were slightly lower at 76% while more respondents (46%) gave negative comments associated with boredom. As discovered in the literature (Acee et. al 2010, Tze et. al 2014), students can have several different meanings of “boredom” when they complain about a class or assignment.

For fall 2013, of the 1,707 students who took the 10 question Qualtrics survey offered at the end of each library session, 912 did so after the "Today's library session was..." question was added to the survey. Of those 912 students, 62 (7%) said they found the session "boring." For fall 2014, 1,261 students took the library survey which included the new question. This time, only 23 (2%) students found the session "boring." For fall 2013, 28 (3%) students reported the library session was confusing and for fall 2014, only 23 (2%) students selected “confusing” to describe the library session.

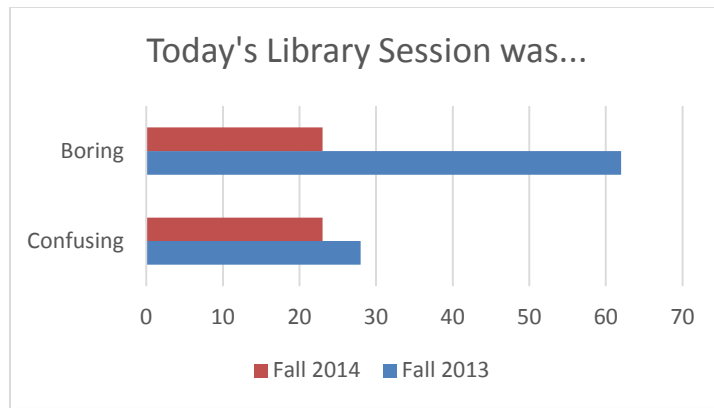


Figure 2. Today's Library Session was...

Of those 62 respondents for fall 2013 who reported boredom, 30 felt it was information they already knew or could find on their own. Twenty-eight students ranged from not being excited or interested in the library to not interested in reading. Four respondents chose to answer the session as "boring" simply because they were tired. Of the 23 students who reported boredom for Fall 2014, only 7

thought they already knew the material or could have figured it out on their own, 1 reported being tired, and 12 thought it was "uninteresting/pointless/don't use the library," 2 were confused or lost, and one was simply "because ADD." The 2 students who reported being bored because they were confused or lost should have answered “confusing” instead of “boring” for this question.

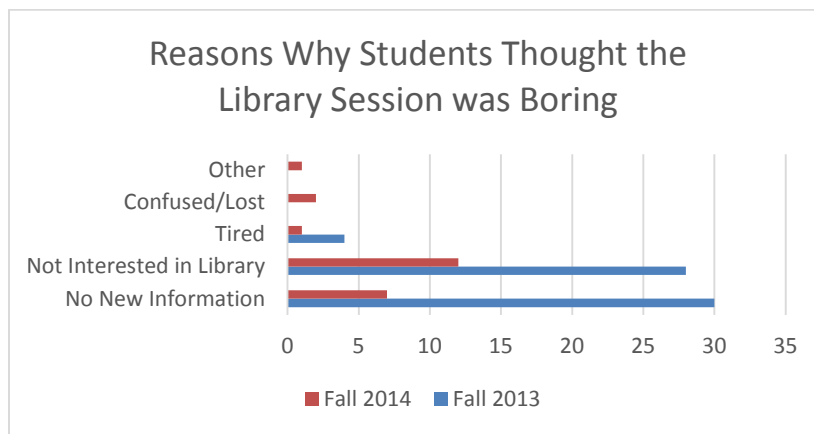


Figure 3. Reasons Why Students Thought the Library Session was Boring

For fall 2013 of the 28 students who thought the session was confusing, 23 were confused about actually finding a book in the stacks, three were confused about the size or layout of the building and two students needed more instruction. Most of these results indicate confusion about the physical library space and not about the library session

itself. As in 2013, students for fall 2014 were also asked to explain any confusion. Twenty-three respondents reported the library session as confusing. Of these, twelve students reported having trouble finding a book, while six were just confused or lost, and five had trouble with the size of the library.

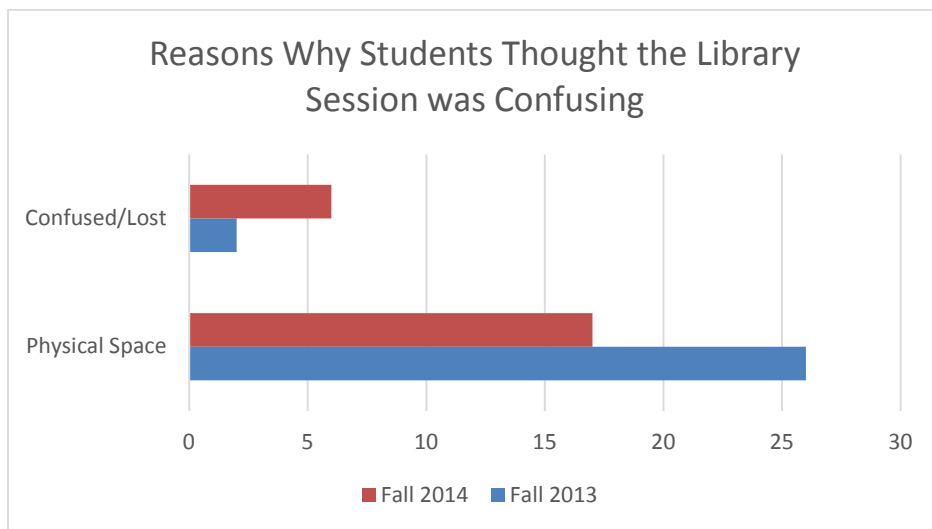


Figure 4. Reasons Why Students Thought the Library Session was Confusing

Survey results from 2013 revealed 812 or 89% of students found the session "interesting and helpful for their courses." For fall 2014 that same question received 1,219 or 96% of respondents.

Despite some students reporting the session as boring or confusing, a majority of students indicated achieving class goals. For the question "How confident are you that you can find a book in the library on your own in the future?" 1,255 or 77% of students in fall 2013 replied confident or very confident. The same question asked in fall 2014 found 1,165 or 93% of students confident or very confident in their abilities to retrieve a book on their own in the future.

Finally, one goal for the class was to establish comfort for first-year students in a large research library. For the question "How likely are you to come back to the library when you need materials or help with research?" 1,417 or 87% of students in fall 2013 responded as likely or very likely to return. For 2014, 1,174 or 94% of students said they would be likely or very likely to return for help in the library.

Discussion

Librarians know that students typically enjoy working in groups, therefore the library session allowed everyone to work together on the five question worksheet and go in groups to the stacks to find books. However, the librarians were hoping for EDHE instructor participation (and/or enthusiasm) since the students would have little to no extrinsic motivation. The students knew that the library

session was not graded (except for participation) and had no attached research assignment. Even information about the university's library that could appear on course exams was provided in a chapter designed for the First Year Experience class textbooks, so students would mainly rely on intrinsic motivational factors to get the most out of the library session. This could have contributed to the idea that the library session was boring or pointless even before the students attended the session.

Because of the 2012 EDHE evaluation feedback and library survey results from 2013, librarians created YouTube videos about the library, how to locate a book, and how to find the library classrooms. These videos allowed EDHE instructors to help students feel more comfortable in the library and gave librarians more opportunity to create efficient one-shot sessions. The switch from physical tours to virtual tours had no noticeable change on students' ability to locate their books or correctly answer survey questions about library spaces and call numbers.

To encourage fun, some librarians asked students to take a selfie with their book before returning to the library classroom to take the quiz. A selfie was defined as taking a selfie with the book you found on the shelf behind you. Many students responded enthusiastically, while some students only photographed the book or simply returned with the actual book. Librarians met at the beginning and end of each semester to discuss what went well and what changes to consider.

Overall, the changes made between 2013 and 2014 had an impact on the number of students reporting boredom as it decreased from 2013 to 2014 from 62 respondents to 23. Though librarians were gratified to see the reduction in comments relating to boredom, there was not a significant decline in reports of confusion as 28 students reported confusion in 2013 and 23 students in 2014. While most confusion is related to the library as a physical space, librarians continue to explore changes that can be made to library sessions and the library itself, such as signage, to lessen student confusion.

Conclusion

Librarians who teach one-shot sessions to first-year students recognize that a challenge with teaching information literacy skills involves student motivation. All sessions won't be exciting to everyone, yet understanding the reasons behind student reported boredom gives librarians a place to start to improve library sessions. Librarians continue to work with class instructors to create obtainable goals for students with limited timeframes. A pattern of positive feedback from students and instructors is

encouraging and librarians will maintain a level of assessment in the future that supports this trajectory.

Librarians understand that many students would rather be someplace other than the library, learning other things and doing more exciting activities. To that effect, librarians will continue to embrace changes for the sake of a better student library experience and the information literate student. Grateful for the opportunity to be embedded in a rapidly-growing freshman curriculum, librarians will continue to tweak library orientation sessions for first-year students based on feedback from course evaluations and library surveys, as well as meetings with class instructors and librarian instructors, in order to help students achieve their academic goals.

By modifying library sessions based on survey results, such as replacing the physical tour with a virtual one, librarians increased student engagement while eliminating elements of boredom. Library instruction sessions can overcome boredom and accomplish library instruction goals as long as librarians are willing to adapt classes and make changes.

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Appendix A

Qualtrics Survey Questions (With Added "Today's library session was..." Question)

1. If you needed to start a research paper next week on the topic of eating disorders, how would you start your research in the library? Describe what you would need to find and how you would find them.
(Short-Answers)
2. Today's library session was...*
 - a. Interesting and helpful for my college courses
 - b. Confusing
 - c. Boring
3. How do you find a book in the University Library?
 - a. Use the search box on the library's website, find the call number, and use the maps to find the right shelves.
 - b. Use Google, and then use the alphabetical listing in the Baxter Room to get the call number.
 - c. Ask at the Service Desk in Special Collections since most books are on the 3rd floor.
4. How do you get help in the library?
 - a. Click Ask-A-Librarian to use the chat service or ask at the Reference Desk.
 - b. Ask the Media Specialist at the Reserve Desk for a consultation.
 - c. Use the 3rd floor Student Services Department to make an appointment.
5. How do you find articles in the library?
 - a. Use the search box with keywords to get a list of articles, then click on "full text online"
 - b. Click "Journal Finder" and get a call number from the appropriate LibGuide
 - c. Use the Online Article Finder to narrow your keywords, then use a library map to get the full text.
6. Where can you go for silent study, where no talking is allowed?
 - a. 1st floor Information Commons
 - b. 2nd floor Pilkington Room
 - c. Entire 3rd floor
7. A call number is...
 - a. The unique letters and numbers for each book in the library
 - b. The volume and issue associated with the journal title
 - c. How the library contacts you when a book or DVD is overdue
8. In your opinion, which is the most important service offered at the J.D. Williams Library?
 - a. Friendly librarians to help you
 - b. Lots of articles and books for research papers
 - c. Quiet study areas
 - d. Group study rooms
 - e. Higher quality and newer articles than Wikipedia or Google

- f. Chat service, so that I can ask questions from anywhere
 - g. Computers, printers, scanners, and other technology
9. How confident are you that you can find a book in the library on your own in the future?
- a. Very confident
 - b. Confident
 - c. Somewhat confident
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Somewhat not confident
 - f. Not confident
 - g. Very not confident
10. How likely are you to come back to the library when you need materials or help with research?
- a. Very likely
 - b. Likely
 - c. Somewhat likely
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Somewhat not likely
 - f. Not likely
 - g. Very not likely

*If B. or C. was selected as an answer from Question 2, the next question the user received was: "Please describe why the session was boring" or "Please describe why the session was confusing."

(Short-Answers)