Faculty Information Literacy Stipend
Final Report

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Course: ITAL 2401: Intermediate Italian I
Semester: Spring 2019

Introduction

One of the objectives of third-semester Italian (ITAL 2401) is to promote a deeper acquaintance with Italy and its culture and the exploration of cross-cultural similarities and differences between Italy and the United States. The course also fulfills the UC 2016 Language and Literature component, the student learning outcomes of which are two-fold: 1) demonstrate an understanding of how a symbolic system communicates meaningfully within its language community and 2) analyze text(s). Because the last two units of the course are focused on the topic of mass media and politics, I wanted to create an assignment that would allow students to reflect on current events from a global perspective in a way that would benefit them personally (by allowing them to reflect not only on Italian culture but also their own culture) and academically (by allowing them to develop critical thinking and research skills that are applicable outside of the foreign language classroom).

With these objectives in mind, I developed a final project assignment about a current global issue with an emphasis on information literacy with research, reading, writing, and speaking components. Students were asked to analyze and describe, in speech and writing, how a specific global issue is represented in Italian and U.S. news outlets, and how such representation(s) are impacted by specific socio-linguistic and cultural contexts and varying degrees of bias. Several information literary program objectives support this project, including: 1) evaluate information with an understanding of context by identifying different types of authority for a specific topic; 2) understand that knowledge is developed through sustained discourse and competing perspectives by evaluating and synthesizing competing perspectives; and 3) apply critical thinking, perseverance, and knowledge of information systems to search for appropriate sources and manage and organize their results.

Description of the information literacy assignment or activities

1. During several in-class reading workshops and written homework assignments, students read Italian newspaper articles on three specific topics (climate change, citizenship rights, gun control). Students then chose one of the three topics and were given a second Italian news article on that topic.
2. Students attended a media evaluation workshop facilitated by Rafia Mirza, Humanities Librarian, and Megan Heuer, Head of Information Literacy on "Evaluating for bias in U.S. Media." After a brief discussion about journalistic norms, sourcing, and how to evaluate media for bias, students analyzed a range of examples from U.S. news outlets with varying degrees of biased coverage.
3. Students worked outside of class to analyze and synthesize their articles in Italian by applying the tools presented in the workshop. They identified indicators of bias and provided examples of how authority is constructed.
4. Students attended a second session in the library during which, with the support of SMU librarians, they learned how to search databases to identify an article from a major U.S. news outlet that addressed their chosen topic. During and following the workshop, students analyzed and synthesized (in Italian, using indirect discourse or direct quotations) the content of the U.S. article.

5. Students wrote a 350-word essay in which they synthesized the content of their sources and reflected on the presence of media bias and the influence of various socio-linguistics factors on media representation of the issue.

6. Students presented their findings orally in the form of a short audio/video essay in which they evaluated, synthesized, and compared the content and form of the articles and discussed how the representation of their chosen topic was impacted by bias and/or diverse socio-linguistic contexts.

Method of assessment
Students were evaluated on their worksheets and final audio/video essays (see rubric and samples below).

Results and impact on student learning
Informally, students commented in class that the project was challenging but worthwhile and enjoyable. One student commented, in an email submission of the written analysis: "I put a lot of effort into it and I may have over-thought it a little bit. However, the whole project is really interesting to me in interpreting the meaning and subjective elements of different newspaper articles." Another student commented, in the writing portion of our final exam, that they appreciated that the course allowed them to learn about contemporary global issues. Based on rubric results, the project was a successful instrument for assessing the language and literature outcomes associated with the course as a whole. Moreover, the assignment had a clear impact on a related assignment, in which students had a 30-minute conversation (via TalkAbroad) with an Italian native speaker on the topic of mass media. It was evident in these conversations that the information literacy project had better prepared the students to pose and respond to questions about the U.S. media and certain global issues in particular, such as immigration and climate change, and how they are represented in Italian and U.S. news outlets.

Summary and next steps
It was exciting for my students to be able to work collaboratively (with each other, with their librarians, and with their Italian conversation partners) to develop skills that will be useful to them beyond and outside the scope of this particular course. In the future, I would like to associate the learning outcomes with more clearly defined, and separate, assignments. Given the students' current language abilities, the task of evaluating three separate sources, synthesizing the information in Italian, and searching for an English-language source proved very challenging. While students successfully achieved the objectives of the assignment and course, if I were to replicate this project in the future, I would replace the written analysis (350-word essay) with an annotated bibliography in which students would identify 3 possible sources from U.S. media outlets. I would not ask students to include a longer analysis of the English-language sources in their final audio/video essay, which I would instead limit to an analysis of the two Italian cources. This would make the project more manageable for students at this level while also using distinct methods to assess distinct information literacy outcomes.

Appendix

- **Assignment Sheet:** https://smu.box.com/s/tek1k1x6tvrqntbuh61ux0bt0vl52w8k
- **Examples of Student Work:**
  - Sample of Evaluation, Synthesis, Sources, Preparation (assignment sheet): https://smu.box.com/s/6iaac4vit9cm5gz30dvm59p4eea8hqdk
  - Sample of oral presentation: https://smu.box.com/s/fouif341ucwdlkxchxe8hlxrsi6a7y9r
  - Sample of language and literature (written analysis): https://smu.box.com/s/j10r4llq6frh9ziqzrzihlmn0cbhfxdj (first draft) https://smu.box.com/s/91shs0mtf99c2knf3ltb02jmcw1lap0u (final draft)

Rubric: ITAL 2401 Information Literacy Project		
Criteria	**Ratings**	**Points**
Evaluation: Students will evaluate information with an understanding of context by identifying different types of authority for a specific topic	14-15 (exemplary) 13-14 (accomplished) 12-13 (developing) 10-12 (beginning) 0-10 (absent)	15 points
Synthesis: Students understand that knowledge is developed through sustained discourse and competing perspectives by evaluating and synthesizing competing perspectives.	14-15 (exemplary) 13-14 (accomplished) 12-13 (developing) 10-12 (beginning) 0-10 (absent)	15 points
Sources and results: Students will apply critical thinking and knowledge of information systems to search for appropriate sources and manage and organize their results.	14-15 (exemplary) 13-14 (accomplished) 12-13 (developing) 10-12 (beginning) 0-10 (absent)	15 points
Oral presentation: Students will present their findings in a short (3-5 minute) audio/video essay with clarity and accuracy using the support of appropriate visual aids and limited captions or headings.	36-40 (exemplary) 32-36 (accomplished) 28-32 (developing) 10-28 (beginning) 0-10 (absent)	40 points
Participation and preparation: In preparation for their final project submission, students will participate in in-class reading and media evaluation workshops, complete preparatory written assignments related to their selection and analysis of sources, and present their findings in class in a short (10-minute) oral presentation.	14-15 (exemplary) 13-14 (accomplished) 12-13 (developing) 10-12 (beginning) 0-10 (absent)	15 points
Language and Literature 1: Students will demonstrate an understanding of how a symbolic system communicates meaningfully within its language community.	5 (exemplary) 4 (accomplished) 3 (developing) 2 (beginning) 1 (absent)	---
Language and Literature 2: Students will analyze or create text such as literature, films, or musical compositions.	5 (exemplary) 4 (accomplished) 3 (developing) 2 (beginning) 1 (absent)	---
		Total: 100