Faculty Information Literacy Stipend Final Report

Name: Alexis McCrossen
Course: History 4300—Junior Research Seminar in US Social and Cultural History
Semester: Fall 2018
Date: November 29, 2018

Introduction

I was curious about teaching information literacy following the criteria that research librarians use to assess information literacy. Since History 4300 has the information literacy tag, this seemed like a good course to work closely with one of SMU's research librarians. Information literacy supports the emphasis in this course on original and extensive research resulting in a lengthy research paper. The information literacy goals helped my students, all history majors, learn how to use real and digital archives and repositories, frame research questions, and assess the quality of sources once they found them.

Description of the information literacy assignment

The students completed five information literacy assignments which altogether helped them identify a topic for their research paper, primary sources for their research paper, and secondary sources for their research paper. On the day their assignments were due we did activities in class, sometimes led by research librarian Ms. Rafia Mirza, that drew on the work that they did. The five information literacy assignments accounted for 25% of their course grade.

Information Literacy #1: Annotating a Scholarly Article
> You do not need to email this assignment, please bring the annotated hard copy to class. Annotate Paul Johnson's article [" 'Art' and the Language of Progress in Early-Industrial Paterson: Sam Patch at Clinton Bridge," *American Quarterly* 40 (December 1988): 433-449] with marginal notations that draw attention the following components of an article: Argument (A); Proof/evidence (P); Historiography (H); Chronology (note the dates); Geography (note the places); Biography (note the people); Yes but (Y) [note the counterargument]; So what (S) [note the larger significance of the argument/topic]; Primary sources (PS); Types of primary sources [note whether source is a diary, personal letter, newspaper account, etc.]; Secondary sources (SS); Academic discipline of secondary source [note whether source written by historian, anthropologist, biologist, etc.]

Information Literacy #2: Collections at the Library of Congress
> After visiting the archival collections digitized at the Library of Congress [https://www.loc.gov/collections/], identify three collections that interest

you. List the name of the collection, provide a link to it, the types of materials found in it (i.e. diaries, letters, musical scores, etc.), the time period(s) and place(s) it covers, and five questions about social or cultural history that the collection might be able to help you answer.

Information Literacy #3: Searchable Terms in Social and Cultural History
Identify three topics in social and/or cultural history that interest you. Then prepare a list of searchable terms for each topic that you might use to search digitized newspapers and periodicals.

Information Literacy #4: Annotated Bibliography of Primary Sources
Primary source annotation (80-100 words): Answer the following questions about each source: Why was this source created and in what context was it produced? Who is the intended audience for the source? What historical information does the source provide that is useful for your paper? What is the point of view of the author, speaker, or creator? What are the main arguments and/or the message presented in this source? What remains unclear to you about this source?

Information Literacy #5: Annotated Bibliography of Secondary Sources
Secondary source annotation (80-100 words): Answer the following questions: What is the main topic of the book or article? What subtopics does the author examine? What are the most important arguments the author makes? What contribution does this work make to the scholarly literature on the topic? How is this source useful for your research?

Method of assessment

I graded each assignment on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being excellent and 1 insufficient. I looked to see whether the student followed instructions, and then at the quality of his/her engagement with the materials. Some students who ended up withdrawing from the course struggled with the assignments, largely due to lack of time management, but the students who succeeded on the assignments, earning 3.5-5 grades, all ended up preparing strong research papers. During the end of the semester discussion about the course they all commented on how useful the assignments had been. In fact, the students suggested that the History Department develop a new course focused on research techniques, skills and strategies, which would be a prerequisite for the Junior Research Seminar.

Summary and next steps

The information literacy curriculum helped my students learn about how to find excellent primary sources and useful secondary sources. Next time I teach the course I will focus more on the use of databases of secondary sources, working with digital archives, and citation management. I will also include some of the exercises we did in this class in other undergraduate courses that I teach.