ADAPTABLE, SUSTAINABLE INFORMATION LITERACY ASSESSMENT:
Four institutions collaborate on an information literacy assessment tool

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Background

Post-secondary institutions and libraries spend large amounts of time and resources on information literacy (IL) instruction programs, but often have limited ability or opportunity to assess the impact of those programs on student learning.

Information Literacy Assessment & Advocacy Project (ILAAP) is a flexible IL assessment tool that will respond to the unique needs of each post-secondary institution. The tool measures the impact of current IL instruction methods on student learning, providing evidence that will inform and improve IL pedagogy at participating institutions.

The tool was designed by librarians at four post-secondary institutions in Alberta, all with a focus on IL instruction at the undergraduate level. The questions included in the tool were created collaboratively, with the group endeavouring to write questions that recognized the diversity of outcomes taught in different classrooms and at different institutions, from article evaluation to citation. Collaboration allowed the team to avoid a lot of duplication of work. Each institution also benefited because the group shared implementation costs.

Methods

Recognizing the time issues inherent with most assessment tests (e.g., Emmett and Emde, 2007), the tool was originally designed to be a brief post-test questionnaire. However, its functionality has now been expanded to allow for use as a pre- and post-test instrument.

Each questionnaire is composed of two sections: a number of summative multiple choice questions to evaluate student learning quantitatively, chosen by each instruction librarian from a pool of questions, and two formative open-ended questions gathering qualitative data about the most useful takeaway and any lack of clarity following the session.

Sample question:
You need to find information on what happened in parliament last week. The best source for this type of information is:

A  Academic journal
B  Course textbook
C  News magazine

The questionnaires are administered using WASSAIL (Version 3.1), open source IL assessment software. Results from individual classes are quickly made available to librarians, allowing them to act on their assessment data following a class. Summary reports are also created each term and at the end of each year.

After each year of the three-year pilot, each question was examined statistically to help the team understand which questions needed to be revised. In the last year of the pilot the team also tested the mapping and levelling of the questions.

Initial Quantitative Findings

There are limitations on what can be learned from the data collected in the pilot phase. The sample sizes for individual questions are too small to be generalizable to a larger population, and the questions themselves were still being tested for reliability and validity. However, the preliminary data gathered revealed interesting patterns.

Questionnaires were completed by 1,810 students in first and second year courses in 2013-2014.

Overall, students demonstrated a good understanding of definitions:
• 95% could correctly define a paraphrase
• 91% could correctly define peer review
• 93% demonstrated an ability to correctly use truncation symbols

Students appeared to struggle more with questions related to source choice and refining searches:
• 67% could select the source that would provide the best evidence for an argument
• 57% could select the best Boolean operator to narrow down a search

Initial Qualitative Findings

When asked what was most useful to students at the end of a library session, they most frequently mentioned learning “how to find things” and “how to know what’s good”:

“How to enter Research questions into the search engines”
“How to see if a journal is peer-reviewed”

When asked what was unclear at the end of a session, most student comments were coded as having to do with confidence or affect:

“Some articles are harder to find than others.”
“the format of APA but eventually I’ll overcome that once I get used to it.”

Future Directions

The tool continues to be assessed for gaps in scope, and the question pool will be revised and expanded. The ILAAP team is also considering how to adapt the tool so that it can be used at institutions teaching within the new ACRL Framework for IL.

In the fall of 2014, an invitation was extended to other institutions who would like to use the ILAAP tool in their instruction sessions. Several new institutions have joined the project, and more are welcome.

For more information or to see if the ILAAP tool would be a useful solution at your institution, please see http://ilaap.ca or email us at ilaap.project@gmail.com

Works Consulted

ilaap.ca/presentations-publications_grants/acrl-2015-virtual-poster-works-consulted/