



Good Practices from Mellon Library Partners, 2003-2004

Active Learning Through Library Sessions in the Reference Room

Environment:

Ethnic Studies 21AC is a large enrollment course, which meets the American Cultures breadth requirement. Approximately 300 undergraduates enrolled. Students were assigned a research paper, utilizing primary and secondary sources, worth 50% of their final grade, with 25% of their grade based upon the bibliography which is due within two weeks of the library sessions. The course met twice weekly in a lecture hall, as well as in 10 discussion group sections led by 10 graduate student instructors.

Impact:

By offering two library sessions a few weeks apart, it was possible to see what progress the students had made in their research and address more specific questions. Fewer students needed follow-up assistance from the reference desk staff with this approach, than in the previous semester when each student only attended one library session.

Description:

After an initial one-hour library session offered to the entire course in the auditorium and guided by a web page designed specifically for that course, a second library session followed. Each of the 10 discussion groups arranged a date to bring their sections to the Doe Library Reference Center for a second library session during which students could work on their specific research projects. Prior to the session, signs were posted near the computer stations to notify patrons that a course would be arriving at a given time and the stations would not be accessible to them. One or two library staff were scheduled to be available during each class session to assist the students. The course web page, designed for the first library session, was a useful starting point for students – especially novice users -- at the second library session though questions ranged from searching library catalogs to delving into reference sources to referrals to other libraries. The second library sessions allowed library staff to tailor the information to each student's individual research questions, and made it possible for students to easily investigate library resources in the reference section and in the stacks. Arrangements are easiest if the library contact receives the names and email of all graduate student instructors (GSIs) from the faculty member and can initiate the arrangements for the second library sessions, especially for those GSIs who are lesser prepared.

Contact:

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