



Good Practices from Mellon Library Partners, 2003-2004

Library Research Assignment for a Large Undergraduate Class

Environment:

Public Health 150A: Introduction to Epidemiology and Human Disease, about 160 undergraduate students. The primary course assignment was to produce a Disease Fact Sheet. The professor required that students use PubMed to identify review articles that provide the necessary information for the assignment. The class met in a large lecture hall with a good projection system.

Impact:

95% of the students demonstrated success at searching PubMed for review articles on a health condition. They further demonstrated success at using subject headings, limiting retrievals, and emailing results.

Description:

The faculty member and I agreed to make the library research component of the course primarily based on an assignment. This was a new approach for me. I designed a one-page assignment whose learning objectives were very closely aligned to the requirements of the major course assignment. I gave a 15-minute presentation during a lecture session of the entire class, covering the basic tasks and concepts of the library assignment. The assignment was distributed at this session, due in less than a week. In addition to turning in the written portion of the assignment, they were required to email PubMed citations to me.

I gave a follow-up 15 minute presentation one week later. By this time I had reviewed all the students' written assignments and the citations they had emailed to me. The written assignment required short, often numeric answers (how many did you retrieve?... what is the subject heading?...etc.), so I was able to quickly see how successfully they had completed the tasks. In this second session I reviewed some aspects of the assignment which had been presented problems. I also demonstrated some more advanced search techniques which would be useful for their major course assignment.

I was pleased with the results of this experiment. Although this model requires more preparation and follow-up time on the part of the librarian, I believe the students benefit from the brief didactic components and do most of their real learning in completing the assignment.

Contact:

Nick Robinson, Public Health Library, nrobinso@library.berkeley.edu