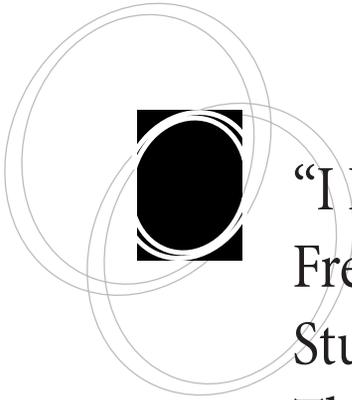


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“I Felt Like Such a Freshman”: First-Year Students Crossing the Library Threshold

Paula R. Dempsey and Heather Jagman

abstract: Qualitative analysis of reflective essays by first-year students in an academic skills course documented outcomes related to the Association of College and Research Libraries Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education. Student narratives showed how novices encounter the clusters of concepts described in the Framework as “Scholarship as Conversation,” “Searching as Strategic Exploration,” and “Research as Inquiry.” Assessing students’ metacognition—that is, their thinking about the learning process—revealed that they connected personal identity with academic conversations, developed strategies for exploring subject classification, and balanced persistence with help-seeking. The open-ended exercise was effective as a collaborative approach to academic engagement and information literacy.

Introduction

What did you see the first time you walked into an academic library? How did you view yourself as a college student? How would recalling that moment in detail change your practice of librarianship? An information literacy (IL) exercise embedded in the first-year experience at DePaul University in Chicago provides a glimpse into a moment most of us have forgotten. The exercise brought students to the threshold of the library, where many, so to speak, stumbled. Qualitative analysis of their brief, reflective essays about going into the library to find and check out a book illuminate students’ early steps on the path to engaging in academic life and becoming information literate.

Even students who breezed through the exercise articulated troublesome concepts that resonate with knowledge practices and dispositions from the Association of Col-



lege and Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education.¹ Some students showed awareness or mastery of a concept. Others grappled

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unsuccessfully with a concept. The novice perspectives in these essays lend empirical weight to existing studies of how experts perceive stumbling blocks.² Evidence from our research supports previous findings that there is no way to predict which IL concepts students have incorporated into their thinking. Concern about having enough time to “cover” an ever-growing list of IL concepts in a traditional, librarian-led session is misplaced.³ Instead, designing a “supportive liminal

environment” allows students to practice new ways of thinking and to develop a new identity as an academic learner.⁴

Specifically, students demonstrated learning around three IL frames—“Scholarship as Conversation,” “Searching as Strategic Exploration,” and “Research as Inquiry.” They exhibited such learning as they:

- Came to see their intellectual interests, personal histories, and future goals as valued in the academic setting.
- Struggled with and sometimes overcame the conceptual barrier of subject classification.
- Experienced the tension between persisting at a task and knowing when to ask for help.

Designing instruction to create a space for students to encounter the frames, in addition to teaching basic skills, is an opportunity to align IL with a larger institutional focus on student retention and student success.

Institutional Context and Collaborative Goals

DePaul University is a diverse, urban institution with a history of outreach to first-generation college students. For 33 percent of the 2013 freshman class, neither parent had a college degree. All first-year students (2,505 in fall 2013) enroll in courses led by a faculty member, a staff member, and a peer mentor. These “Chicago Quarter” courses are designed to engage students with the city and the university and to introduce academic and life skills leading to student success. During the “Common Hour,” peer mentors guide discussions and deliver content on a variety of cocurricular topics related to defining the university experience for learners and developing habits of mind that support academic success. Peer mentors are a diverse group of older undergraduates selected for their own academic success. The peer mentors’ closeness to the experience of entering as a new student lends credibility to guide the younger students on topics such as note taking, time management, and dealing with stress.

Working as an ACRL Assessment in Action team, the Library, Writing Center, Office for Academic Advising Support, and Center for Students with Disabilities designed a library experience to be delivered and graded by the Chicago Quarter peer mentors. The exercise asks students to consider a topic of personal or academic interest, to use the library discovery tool to identify an item, to physically find the item in the library, and to check it out (Appendix A). Students wrote a brief essay reflecting on the process of finding library materials, what they found novel about the academic library in comparison to previous library experiences, and how the library can support their success as academic learners. More than just “looking for a book,” the exercise gets students out of the comfort zone of Internet-based research and jump-starts their familiarity with the library. It allows students to stumble and even fail with no consequences, to get over the failure, and to use the library more easily and confidently when the stakes are higher.⁵ The team intended students to:

- Consider and discuss their interests, providing a basis for effective interactions with the departments that provide advising and career services.
- Practice an important IL skill, problem solve, and explore a new space.
- Integrate prior knowledge and experience about research and libraries.
- Notice people studying and researching and begin to see themselves as members of a learning community.

The original research team applied a rubric to assess learning outcomes and presented the results in a poster at the American Library Association (ALA) Annual Conference in Las Vegas in 2014.⁶ We report here on a second phase of analysis, focused on synthesizing the narratives to show the various approaches to the library, the hurdles encountered, and the students’ emotional responses, help-seeking, and learning outcomes (both self-reported and demonstrated) related to threshold concepts in the IL Framework.

Literature Review

Research on student engagement, reflective learning, and threshold concepts in information literacy provide theoretical underpinnings for the design of this assignment. Ella R. Kahu sees student engagement as a complex interplay between cognitive, behavioral, and affective learning.⁷ Engaging students in academic life is especially crucial for first-generation students, who bring less social capital in terms of their family’s connection to higher education. Stacy Brinkman, Katie Gibson, and Jenny Presnell note that first-generation students experienced stress from perceiving themselves as outsiders.⁸ Mark Palmer, Paula O’Kane, and Martin Owens used interpretive techniques to

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understand how first-year students negotiate feelings of not belonging as they transition between home and university.⁹

Promoting early library experiences can relieve library anxiety and encourage a sense of belonging in the academic setting.¹⁰ Collaboration with campus partners integrates

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IL with broader academic success skills and attitudes.¹¹ Some of these efforts engage students over the course of an academic term, but David S. Yeager and Gregory M. Walton argue that even brief activities or “interventions”

focused on students’ feelings about their academic experience can have large and lasting impact on educational achievement.¹² Mary Ryan found that active reflection on such activities helps people to understand the context of their learning and use this knowledge “to re-imagine and ultimately improve future experience.”¹³ Other studies document the role of reflective learning specifically in IL gains.¹⁴

These perspectives on engaged learning support the effort to shift from teaching IL Standards to focusing on broad conceptual frames. In February 2015, ACRL “filed” the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education—that is, placed the Framework in its official records. The Framework provides a shared platform for developing curricula around core IL concepts and assessing learning outcomes for those concepts. The six “frames” in the ACRL document are complex, interwoven ideas about the production and use of information. Each frame incorporates “threshold” concepts that function as entryways into the practices, attitudes, and habits necessary for mastering IL.

This study demonstrates that knowledge practices and dispositions identified by librarians appear in student narratives of basic encounters with academic libraries.

Empirical research on threshold concepts has been active in the United Kingdom and Australia, with emphases on business and the sciences.¹⁵ Amy R. Hofer, Lori Townsend, and Korey Brunetti synthesized experts’ views about which IL concepts are troublesome to students.¹⁶ We contribute to this work evidence of students’ encounters with the concepts described in their own words. This study demonstrates that knowledge practices and dispositions identified by librarians appear in student narratives of basic encounters with academic

libraries. Research by Jan Meyer and Ray Land documented “the difficulty experienced by expert practitioners looking back across thresholds they have personally long since crossed.”¹⁷ This analysis is the first to add IL to the list of disciplines (including biology, computer science, economics, and engineering) for which researchers have identified troublesome concepts directly from novices.¹⁸

Data and Methods

We analyzed ninety-seven one- to two-page essays written as ungraded homework in a required academic skills course for first-year students. The exercise prompt appears as



Appendix A. Not every course section participated, and students self-selected into sections based on themes and scheduling. Music students, a selective program at DePaul, are overrepresented in the data. We do not know which other demographics might differ from the typical distribution. We do not claim to present what an “average” first-year student thinks and feels when visiting a university library for the first time. Our goal is to map in rich detail the complex, contradictory ways these ninety-seven individuals “reveal threshold concepts through moments of realisation of how a subject community thinks and practices.”¹⁹

Students wrote the essays for peer mentors. They did not know librarians would be reading their essays until they agreed to participate in the study, after the assignment had been completed. This context gave students little incentive to impress the reader, even subconsciously. They casually express embarrassment, confusion, surprise, irritation, and enthusiasm. Among the authentic responses are a smaller number of essays contrived to minimize effort: three that described an obviously fabricated search path, two partially plagiarized “book reports,” and one that mocked the exercise as simplistic and patronizing: “A library! How could I have been so naive? It was the perfect cure for the disease known as Young Adult Apathy (YAA)” (essay 21). These outliers reinforced our sense of the authenticity of the other essays.

We began by immersing ourselves in the data using NVivo qualitative analysis software to track a range of impressions and share them. Working individually, we developed shorthand descriptions known as “codes” to mark passages related to themes of interest (for example, autonomy, career, intellectual interest, and library anxiety). We reviewed, discussed, and recoded the texts; grouped codes in themes; then reread and reconsidered them using the constant comparison method, in which each instance of a theme is rigorously analyzed for similarities and differences to previously identified examples.²⁰

Counting words and assigning codes are useful strategies for making sense of a large data set. But coding carries the risk of imposing the coders’ preconceptions. Richard Biernacki suggests literary or narrative analysis as an antidote to this problem.²¹ We strove to understand the coded material in the context of the students’ overall narratives. Our goal is a shared interpretation that connects and clarifies as many of the texts as possible while not ruling out other possible meanings.²² Frequencies reveal comparative strength of themes and narrative structures in the data set, but we make no statistical claims. The complete anonymized essays are available in the institutional repository at DePaul University: http://works.bepress.com/heather_jagman.

Findings

Figure 1 diagrams the basic search paths that students described in the essays. Of the ninety-seven students, seventy followed the instructions to search the catalog, find an item, go to the library, and check it out. Of the twenty-seven students who did not follow instructions, sixteen chose to select a book at random. They “meandered around” (essay 23), “wandered around” (essay 74), located a book by “roaming through the psychology section” (essay 68), or “stumbled into the jazz section by a lovely mistake” (essay 15). Another six students found and checked out a book accompanied by library staff

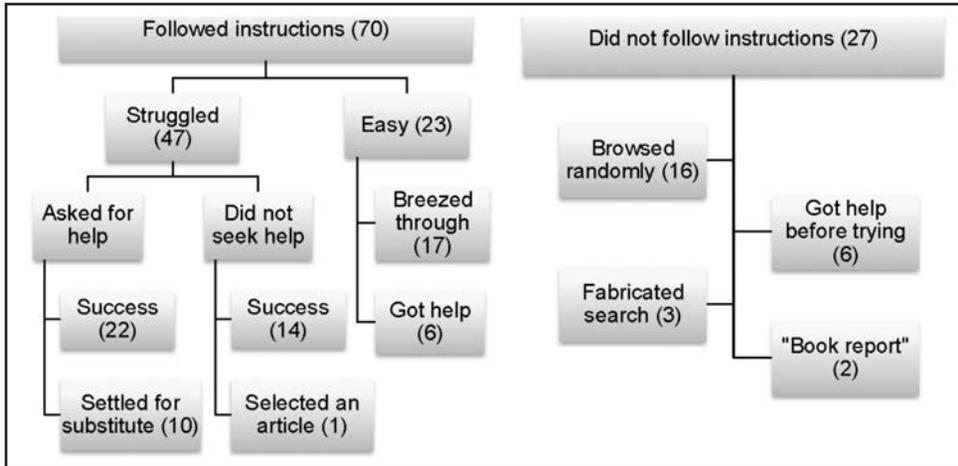


Figure 1. Narrative paths in student essays

rather than gaining the necessary skills to do so on their own. Three students fabricated a search process, which became evident from trying to replicate their paths. Two wrote a "book report" but did not reflect on the search process.

The seventy students who followed instructions described four basic narratives.²³ Appendix B provides a representative essay from each of these groups:

- Succeeded with help: Twenty-two students struggled in various ways, asked for help, and eventually found the item.
- Breezed through: Seventeen students found the process easy and succeeded without assistance.
- Persisted: Fourteen students encountered obstacles, experimented with search strategies, and succeeded on their own.
- Settled: Ten students received assistance but still could not find the item and settled for a different item in the same general area to complete the assignment.

Students on each of these paths reported emotional responses to the experience. Figure 2 shows the words they used related to affect, dominated by *confused*, *excited*, and *surprised*. All four paths led students to encounter threshold concepts from the IL Framework described in the following sections on "Scholarship as Conversation," "Searching as Strategic Exploration," and "Research as Inquiry." Their reflections on the concepts sometimes demonstrated awareness or even mastery. In other cases, students got stuck. While our analysis follows the stages of the assignment, we do not mean to imply that students reported the experience linearly. Quotations from the essays preserve typographical and other errors.

Think of an Item: Students Join the Scholarly Conversation

The frame "Scholarship as Conversation" calls for students to "See themselves as contributors to scholarship." Developing this disposition requires that students learn to value their interests, experiences, and voices. The assignment prompts students to "Be

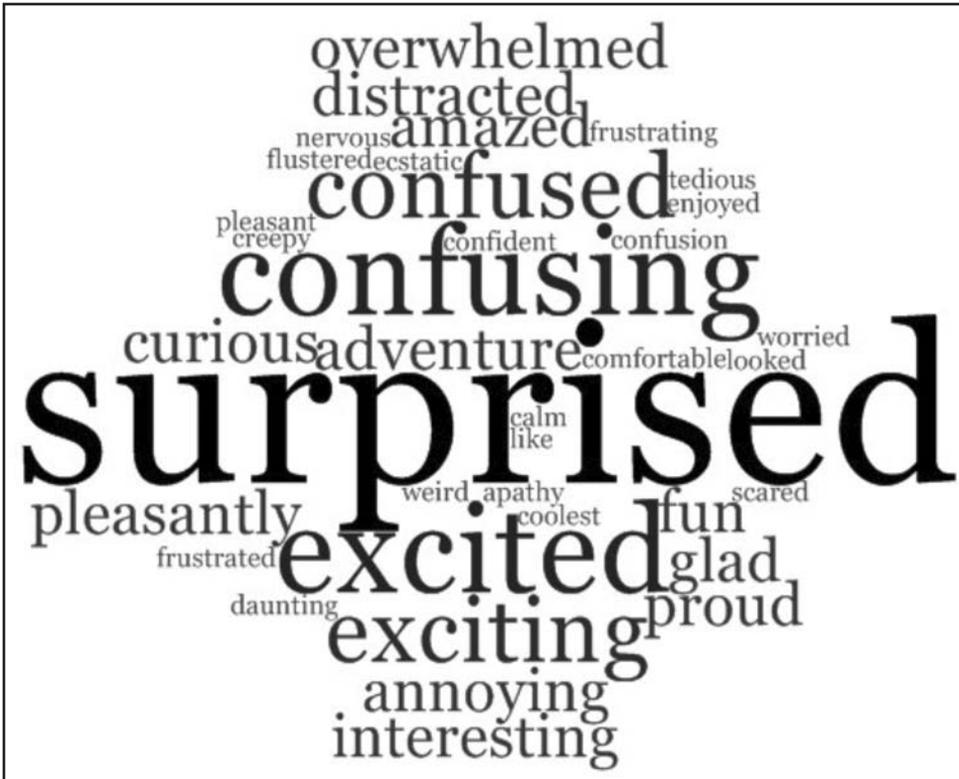


Figure 2. Emotions expressed in student essays

Curious! . . . Think of an item of interest to you” and suggests a range of recreational and academic topics. Students reflected on academic interests in twenty-eight essays. Their commitment to these widely varied topics is deep: several mention love (essays 12, 24, 53) or passion (essays 20, 44). One student admits to being a “huge fan of Shostakovich” (essay 32). Another’s “heart shattered” when unable to fit the study of French into the class schedule (essay 35).

Students’ interests were closely tied to personal identity. They chose to find library material about where they came from (thirteen essays recalling childhood memories or family history) or about who they wished to become (twenty-three essays pondering career goals). Most essays that connect the assignment to personal history recollect light-hearted topics, such as gaming with a brother (essay 89), attending Chicago Crosstown Classic baseball games with a father (essay 42), or a mother’s favorite play (essay 24). Other students had more disturbing memories. One looked for a book about Lithuanian partisans because of relatives killed in resistance to the Soviet Union (essay 61). Another selected a book about street gangs because, the student explained, “Growing up on the south side of Chicago, I was exposed to gang crime at a very young age” (essay 93). In each of these essays, students found their own experiences and histories reflected in knowledge that is valued in the academic setting. This identity work may confirm students’ sense of belonging at a time when they are feeling at sea.²⁴ First-generation



college students, especially, need to believe that their individual stories matter in the academic community.²⁵ We do not have demographics for these specific essay writers, but in their cohort, 33 percent of students are the first in their families to attend college. Cultivating a sense of belonging in the academic setting and having the ability to contribute to the scholarly conversation meet a goal beyond IL and provide an important boost to students’ retention and success.

The “Scholarship as Conversation” frame also asks learners to “Recognize that they are often entering into an ongoing scholarly conversation.” Students articulated this awareness in various ways. One mused, “Although I have taken so many years of

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Ethiopian history, it never ceases to amaze me that there is still more to be discovered and explored” (essay 90). Another student described being “eager to learn a lot of different things while in college other than music.” This student associated “being educated in multiple facets” with a richer creative life (essay 19). A third student observed, “Each class might not teach me everything I want to know. Which is what the library could be for, to learn things that I would have otherwise skipped in class” (essay 46). A fourth noted, “When I do research I

like to learn about different sides of an argument” (essay 60). These students might have crossed the threshold into this disposition before starting college. The value of reflecting on the exercise lies in internalizing the concept by representing it in new ways and connecting it to their lives.²⁶

Search the Library Catalog: Students Explore Strategically

The “Search as Strategic Exploration” frame includes the knowledge practice of understanding how information systems are organized. In this basic exercise, the necessary intellectual hurdle is to connect a catalog search for a call number to the subject classification in the stacks. Students who articulated this connection (essays 5, 6, 28, 47, 63) breezed through the task or overcame struggles independently. Such students said, for example, “I looked up women’s rights on the online library catalog and it sent me to the 323’s” (essay 5); “It gave me a call number on a section of books that I might be interested in” (essay 6); and “I wrote down a few locations of books to find a location of the topic” (essay 63). These students have passed through a threshold that is transformative and irreversible. Having adopted a knowledge practice in one library setting, the strategy seems obvious to them (and to us).

For other students, this connection is decidedly troublesome. At least one student assumed that a capable user of the library would find specific material without looking it up and regarded the catalog as a crutch for the uninitiated: “When you are new to it, it is hard to find much of anything in the library, so in the end, I just looked it up on the library’s webpage” (essay 32). The sixteen students who browsed randomly rather than starting with a catalog search as instructed might have shared this misconception.



The students who struggled with the organization of print materials included some who reflected on library experience (nineteen in school libraries; eighteen in public; two in academic). Mental models based on smaller collections geared to recreational reading did not serve students well because the books were not “sectioned in like teen books, science, but instead they were scattered all over” (essay 11). Students thought the organization was “cryptic” (essay 50), “weird” (essay 80), or “nonsensical” (essay 9). They said that “navigating the call number is difficult” (essay 4) or “a very tedious and annoying job” (essay 39). Others found the catalog overwhelming: “My search was extremely general . . . which led to many irrelevant results” (essay 52); “The online library search engine is very specific, so not knowing the title of the book I wanted was a disaster” (essay 49).

Mental models based on smaller collections geared to recreational reading did not serve students well.

Overconfidence may have played a role. Students asserted, “Although I was unable to find the book I intended to check out where I think it should have been, I would imagine it would be relatively easy to locate other items” (essay 16); “I feel very confident in my knowledge of the dewey decimal system” (essay 54); and “I understood the system, so if the book was there, it would have been easy to locate” (essay 58). Another student who claimed familiarity with libraries was “not used to using the call number instead of the ISBN number to find books” (essay 36), and still another recalled using “alphabetical barcodes” to find them (essay 38). Such examples resonate with the work of Melissa Gross and Don Latham, who found that first-year students’ estimates of their IL abilities do not square with objective measurements of their skills.²⁷ Students are convinced the problem lies in the library’s lack of organization and not in their lack of understanding.

First-year students’ estimates of their IL abilities do not square with objective measurements of their skills. Students are convinced the problem lies in the library’s lack of organization and not in their lack of understanding.

Other students gained understanding in the course of the exercise. One student started out assuming, as in many public libraries, that “usually books are alphabetized through the authors’ last name or through genres” but eventually noticed “the books were categorized with numbers that could be retrieved when you look up the book in the computer” (essay 95). Another student looking for a biography of John Cage wrote down an incomplete call number:

Upon arriving at the music section I realized that there were way more books about composers than I had previously anticipated. I saw a similar book that was a biography on a composer who recently died named Elliott Carter . . . I was amazed that the library had a biography on him as he wasn’t as well known (essay 25).

This student learned about the scope of the collection in his or her field, serendipity as a benefit of browsing the stacks, and the practical skill of recording the entire call num-



ber. Telling students about classification is unlikely to make an impression as lasting as one that results from figuring it out on their own. For students who fail to make the conceptual leap, a debriefing session in which their peers explain the concept will likely be more effective than a lecture.²⁸

Go to the Campus Library: Persistence versus Seeking Guidance

The assignment intentionally omits specific instructions. It encourages exploration to show students that learning is a process and that reflecting on mistakes can lead to new insights. The prompt “Ask a library staff member if you’re not sure” might seem contradictory. Expecting students both to take responsibility for their own learning and to ask for help when needed reflects the tension between self-reliance and requesting assistance in the examples of dispositions related to two IL frames:

- “Research as Inquiry”: “Value persistence, adaptability, and flexibility” and “Seek appropriate help.”
- “Searching as Strategic Exploration”: “Seek guidance from experts” and “Persist in the face of search challenges.”

Evidence from these essays demonstrates the value of giving students an arena to experience and reflect on both independent effort and outside expertise. The opportunity for students to stretch in both of these dispositions will be of interest to campus partners as a means of promoting academic and lifelong success.

Using a library on their own was new for some students, who in the past “usually had my mom with me” (essay 11), “would always look the book up online and then put a hold on it” (essay 53), or “would always just ask the librarian to find the book for me” (essay 93). Some students articulated the desire for autonomy: “Believe it or not, I found this book on my own” (essay 17); “At first, I decided to trust myself and go on my own” (essay 41); “Something told me to try again” (essay 95). Others felt that to ask for help was to throw in the towel, “cave,” or give up (essays 41 and 62) or a “gradual shedding of self-reliance” (essay 9). Accomplishing the task independently was a fun challenge for some. One student got a big payoff from persistence: “I was ecstatic, through some hard work and learning from my mistakes I was able to find the book and realize how resourceful and organized the library actually is” (essay 95). Another student “had to” ask for help but expressed the value of persistence: “It was not as hard as I expected, I just have to look harder, and not be so impatient” (essay 36).

The spectrum of attitudes toward assistance ranged from dependence—“My plan was to ask for help as soon as I could find it” (essay 39)—to fear—“If only I had the courage to ask for help” (essay 80). One student wanted to avoid embarrassment: “I would still like to know how to use the computers with more ease . . . then I can just do

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the whole thing by myself instead of having to ask the front desk and get looked at like I am crazy” (essay 100). Between the extremes of overreliance and anxiety were students who appreciated that help was available: “The people at the library are very willing to help you with anything you need, and will go out of their way to make sure that you



have the required materials to learn” (essay 37). Students who articulated this golden mean included some, like the writer of the previous example, who had breezed through the exercise and some who had persisted after meeting obstacles. This writer belonged to the latter category: “I knew that if I wasn’t able to find the item on my own I could just ask a librarian for help” (essay 50). Feeling confident about having assistance at hand might have contributed to their determination.

In fifty-nine essays, students mentioned interacting with others as part of the exercise. Most students spoke with library staff, but five students relied on help from friends. The interactions in twenty essays were transactional (for example, checking out the book), but eight students described a staff member teaching them a skill or concept: looking up books, negotiating the stacks, reciprocal borrowing, interlibrary loan, the difference between circulating and reference books, or the difference between the record for a book review and for a book. Students valued learning at the point of need and expressed interest in learning more:

It’s funny when what seems like a complicated system becomes convenient and simpl[e] when someone explains the whole process. If I had had more time, I would have definitely asked for opportunities like being able to access microfiche or being able to view possible archived documents if present (essay 80).

Another student received help but not enlightenment about the process or the sense of resilience gained from mastering a new skill:

I asked her where I can find it and she searched on the computer and she then lead me to the book. She was really kind and helpful. Before I went to the library I thought that it was going to be difficult to find the book because there are four floors, but the librarian knew where she was going and she made it quick (essay 65).

Compare the above with the affective gain for another student: “When I found the book I was so proud of myself because it is such a huge library, and I found what I was looking for” (essay 39).

Discussion and Conclusions

The concern that a librarian will be unable to adequately cover threshold concepts in a traditional library research session is rooted in a transmission model of teaching, which prioritizes delivery of content over student learning.²⁹ Self-directed, reflective learning has pedagogical advantages over librarian-led sessions for incorporating elements of the IL Framework. Students completing an exercise independently will speed through aspects of the task they have mastered and spend more time on unfamiliar concepts. A librarian delivering a typical 50-minute session, even one with active learning techniques, moves the whole group along at the same pace to convey all the information. This study rejects the transmission model because there is no way to predict which concept will present a threshold to any individual student.³⁰ A properly designed assignment will give students the opportunity to stumble over their own thresholds.

The design factors that led students to cross-conceptual thresholds in this basic exercise were the same factors that made it attractive to campus partners. First, stu-



dents had the freedom to consider and pursue their own interests and goals, which helped them to see themselves as members of the academic community. Second, the instructions were open-ended rather than detailed, which encouraged exploration and

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problem-solving. First-year students might be overwhelmed with complex concepts before they work up the courage to enter the library. A better approach allows them to practice basic IL skills in a safe environment with no grade at risk: "After all, it is easier to learn when it is not for a grade, and you are not under pressure" (essay 3). Third, the exercise encouraged reflection. Students can and do make connections between library use and their personal interests, career

goals, and academic success if they learn to value metacognition (thinking about their learning process). And fourth, students completed the exercise in the larger context of academic skills. The collaborative approach freed librarians from repetitive instruction and allowed students to express themselves candidly to peer mentors.

One aspect of the instructional design not considered in this study is how peer mentors debriefed with students after the exercise. The essays show gaps in basic understanding. The program plan must train peer mentors to help students learn from one another. The discussion should focus on where students got stuck and how some found their way. In particular, students who regard asking for help as a failure of autonomy might learn from peers whose interactions were helpful. Peer mentors need a way to convey unpleasant or frustrating experiences to library administrators, who might bring about service improvements.

The findings of this study also point to possible improvements in frontline public services. The essays help library staff to see through the eyes of a first-time user how confusing a large academic library can be. Even students who thought of themselves as library users and readers were overwhelmed. First-year students are also developing a balance between independence and help-seeking. Asking what the student has already tried and being transparent with the search process are useful for bridging autonomy and dependence (or "gradual shedding of self-reliance"). Being friendly and helpful matters, and so does fostering the confidence that follows independently trying a new skill.

This analysis demonstrates that an independent learning activity, when coupled with reflection, effectively exposed first-year students to a number of concepts in the IL Framework. The intellectual commitment and affective gains evident in these essays show that a basic exercise can promote both information literacy and engagement in the academic setting. The range and depth of connections students made, even in quickly produced, ungraded essays, impressed us. Immersing ourselves in these essays has made us see students differently: they are more vulnerable, more intellectually invested, and hungrier for authentic learning than we had thought.



Acknowledgments

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Appendix A

Assignment Prompt

Be Curious! Academic Success Skills Common Hour Library Assignment

Think of an item of interest to you that might be in DePaul's Lincoln Park or Loop campus library. This could be a book or movie you remember enjoying in the past, a book that appears in a class syllabus, or even a video game. You may want to try to find something related to a personal or academic area of interest: green energy, animation, entrepreneurship, a play, or a book of poetry. If you are still unsure, try to find a book related to the subject of your Discover or Explore Chicago class.

Go to <http://library.depaul.edu/> and search the library catalog to locate the item.

Go to the campus library that has your item, find the item on the shelf, and check it out. If the item you found is not available for checkout, please find and check out a related item. (Items not available for checkout may include books already checked out to another person, books on reserve for a class, or e-books. Ask a library staff member if you're not sure, or if you have questions about any of these steps.)

Bring the book or item and your essay that includes responses to the following reflection questions to class next week.

Reflection Questions

Many classes will require you to reflect on the work you've done, usually in the form of a short essay. Taking the time to think about your thought process helps you to consider what you've learned and how you might put that knowledge into practice in the future.



In writing your brief (one- or two-page) essay, please include the name of the book or item you found and brought to class. Include your responses to all of the following questions:

- Why are you interested in this item?
- Did you look for a specific item, or just any book or other material about your topic?
- Did you find it, or did you end up checking out another related item?
- Please detail the steps you took to find your item. Please be as specific as possible. Was it easier or harder to find something than you expected?
- What about this experience was new to you?
- What was familiar?
- What would you still like to know?
- Based on this activity, describe at least one way the library can support your role as an academic learner.

Appendix B

Essays Representative of Each Main Search Path

Succeeded with Help (Essay 9)

It was harder to find a book than I expected. Granted, I probably made it more difficult than it ever should have been. The first thing I did was to walk up the stairs to every level and evaluate what I saw. The first three levels seemingly had no books. They had students studying, and media, and reference materials, and so on. The fourth floor had books, but I was so flustered by the lack of genre specifications that I went up and down to all the floors at least three more times looking for who knows what. The lack of signs indicating the genre of a book was new to me. I was used to seeing Fiction, Non-Fiction, Science, Art, Music, etc. listed on shelves. Here, I had to deal with a nonsensical system of numbers. I caved and decided to use a computer to search for something. I searched for "Kurt Vonnegut" because I like his writing style and wrote down the call number for his novel "Galapagos." After looking at the call number, I realized that it made absolutely no sense to me so I caved again in my gradual shedding of self-reliance and asked a librarian what the number meant and if there was some encrypted way to tell the floor from the numbers. Turns out there is, and my book was on the fourth floor. Luckily I ran into a friend who told me that my book was in the shelf one over from the one it was actually in. So I spent a while in that section. Finally, I found my book. However, I decided I would have absolutely no time to read a novel, so I started perusing some short stories by John Updike, an author who I also enjoy. I decided on a collection of John Updike short stories entitled "The Music School." I was interested to see what John Updike, an author who I admire, had to say about the place where I am currently studying. However, this is probably just wishful thinking, because it will most likely have nothing to do with a music school. I guess one thing familiar about this experience were the resources available for finding a book (computers and librarians). I still want



to know what kinds of materials I can get on the first three floors, and am interested to see if I will use any in the future. I think one way that the library can help me as a university learner is by acting as a sanctuary in which to study. Desks and comfy chairs abound, and it was so quiet that when I walked down the stairs I felt a compulsive need to apologize for the obscene racket I was making.

Breezed Through (Essay 59)

I checked out “Selected Poems of Carl Sandburg.” I originally intended on checking out “Chicago Poems” by Carl Sandburg but the[y] only had it electronically. I chose this book because last year in a class we read some of his poems that I really enjoyed.

I started my search with going to DePaul’s library website. On there I searched for Carl Sandburg, and when I found out that “Chicago Poems” was only electronic I looked at his other books. I found out that “Selected Poems” has many of the same poems as the one I originally intended to get. I found this out by reading the “content” section under the book online. After that I looked at the location of the book in the library, which gave me the call number. I searched the website for the library map which shows where each group of call numbers are located. My book was in the 811 ranges, so it was located on the 4th floor. The next day, I went to the library, climbed so many stairs that I was out of breath to get to the 4th floor. I followed the signs that directed me to the left to the 700–820 call numbers. I followed the numbers to find 811, and then looked up my book again on the library part of iDePaul app, which gave me 811 sa21se, which I found right away on the shelf. I went back down to the first floor to the circulation desk, handed them my book and ID, and I was done.

After I left, I realized I probably haven’t checked out a book in perhaps 10 years. It was a lot easier than I remember because of the online aspect. It helped because I didn’t have to shuffle around the whole library to find a book. If I needed help there were resource people that could have helped me find my book. The library is one of the greatest resources. It has so many different types of mediums, written and electronic. Even though most things are all online, there are still old texts that are very useful for future projects and research.

Persisted (Essay 95)

Learning to use a library can help us identify books that can help us gain more knowledge. There are many different types of books in libraries like entertainment books, autobiographies, research books, etc. Even if you do not know what exactly you are looking for, with a few keywords you can find a large list of books that relate to whatever it is you are thinking about. The book that I found through many trials and errors was “Real Sports Reporting” by Abraham Aamidor.

When I first stepped into the library I already knew that the book I wanted to find had to be about my future profession, which is a sports reporter. I did not know any books about sports reporting in general, so I was confident that the Library was going to be able to help me out. I went to the computers on the front of the library and typed in two keywords “sports” and “reporting.” A few books came up on the screen, but what surprised me the most was how the very first book shown is what drew my attention



"Real Sports Reporting," I knew this was the book I wanted to find not just because I had to find it, but because it was a book that could potentially help me out in the future. I was a little confused at first on how to find the book, because usually books are alphabetized through the authors' last name or through genres. So I went upstairs to the second floor and looked around for a bit and I noticed two things. First, there really wasn't any books there just volumes of books. Secondly, the books were categorized with numbers that could be retrieved when you look up the book in the computer. So I pretty much knew that I had to do it all over again.

I went back to the computer and found the numbers that I needed, but I still didn't know where to look because the number was 070.5 and the numbers I saw were way higher. So I went to the third floor could not find it, and I went to the fourth floor still could not find. I was just going to go to give up and go to the circulation desk, but something told me to try again. I eliminated the floors the book could not be in, the first and second floor were automatically off the list. So that just left me with third and fourth floor, I knew it could not be the fourth floor because the numbers there were around the 700s and 800s, so that just left the third floor.

When I went back to the third floor I immediately hit myself on the head because I missed the most important detail that could have led me to the book minutes ago. There was a sign on top that said books that were 200 and below were on the left side, this whole time I was going aisle through aisle left and right hoping to just find it. So I went all the way to the end of the left side and found 080, so I knew I was getting close to finding it. As I kept going down the numbers became smaller, and I started to realize the books were also categorized with similar topics. There was a section of all types of education books, language books, etc. So I knew I had to find a section that was related somewhere with media. I saw some books that had media on them and scanned all way down and I saw it, a red book with the side label 070.5 and the title "'Real Sports Reporting.'" I was ecstatic, through some hard work and learning from my mistakes I was able to find the book and realize how resourceful and organized the library actually is.

Even though finding the book was a long process the hard part is now over, I know exactly how I can find a book in less than 5 minutes. Some prior knowledge that helped me was that I knew that libraries organize books in a certain manner, I just had to figure out how exactly this library did it. The library in general is a great tool to relax and enjoy a good book or to even find a book that can help you with some type of research. The library is a great resource as long as you know how to utilize it.

Settled (Essay 11)

This book was previously suggested by a friend; they had said that it was really moving and good. I read the back of the book. The reviews on it were saying how amazing it was which made me think, wow my friend must be right so I decided to check it out. When searching the library, I specifically looked for this book. The first thing I did was look online to check and see if they had the book, which said that they had so then I went out and checked it out. Sadly, when I went to the library on Saturday, I went in and asked for the Alchemist, yet when I looked through the shelf it wasn't there. I continued to look for a book that interested me, so I started walking towards the left



side of where the Alchemist was supposed to be which is where I found *Touched* by Stephen Lowe. The reason why this book attracted me was because at first glance it was pink, which is my favorite color. I turned it around and read that it was set in London, which is my dream vacation place and in queen's age. The library was a lot larger than I expected so I found myself wondering around slightly lost. When I first walked into the library I asked this man on the left side of the library where the Alchemist was, he gave a number and that it was on the fourth floor. I ran up the stairs to the fourth floor, where I saw letters and numbers. I went straight to the line where the Alchemist was supposed to be yet when it wasn't there I continued searching for any book that was interesting. After I found *touched*, I ran down the stairs all the way to the second floor where the DVD's and media was where I found my second book is anybody out there? Which seemed like a good fast book to look through and learn something so I took it out of the shelf. I concluded my journey to the library by going back to the first floor and asking to check them out. She scanned them and put them through some magnet thing, which was really different. Then I handed her my Id, and she scanned it. She then told me that they were both due on Nov 2nd and smiled. I returned her smile thanked her then left. It was slightly easier than I had expected, yet the size of the library surprised me! It was so quiet too, you can honestly hear a pin drop. I felt like every step I took was disturbing the students in the library so I felt like I needed to go quicker. I think I found a new place to study. The fact that you can just check it out reminded me of my public library near home. You find the book and check it out. This library was so much bigger and it really wasn't sectioned in like teen books, science, but instead they were all scattered all over. The fact that I had to independently find the book and check it out on my own was completely new to me. I usually had my mom with me in the library I had back home. I would like to know where the fun books are, like *blue blood*, *pretty little liars* and *vampire diaries*. Since when I study, I tend to need quiet places to concentrate I will be going there to study.

Notes

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