Playing Cards for Information Literacy: An Active Learning Experiment

MELISSA CLARK

INFORMATION SERVICES LIBRARIAN

SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY

Introduction

FIRST YEAR SEMINARS AT SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY

SDSU is in the process of implementing a newly designed student success model.

One aspect of this student success model is the First Year Seminar (FYS), which was fully implemented in the fall of 2012 (South Dakota State University).

These seminars are intended to help students adjust to campus life and bridge the gap between secondary and post-secondary education.

University College 109
Spring 2013 Student Learning Objectives

Students Will Be Able To:
- Identify keywords, synonyms, and related terms for topic
- Use the library catalog to find resources on a topic
- Use the Library of Congress call number system to locate books on the shelf

The instructors of the University College first year seminar, UC 109, chose to work with us on designing an information literacy activity for their course.

I had an idea for a different way to present the lecture material and engage students in the spring 2013 sessions: I developed a set of cards, each stating a different information need, and I asked students to demonstrate for the class how to find the needed information.

My activity addressed the session's first 2 objectives; there was a second activity to address the third objective.

Inception & Design

DEVELOPING AN ENGAGING ACTIVITY

Student evaluations of our instructional sessions for introductory classes frequently indicate that they are very similar. Since the UC 109 instruction session was to cover several of the same topics, I was also looking for a way to make this session distinctive and memorable.

I had been reading about different approaches to active learning and was eager to experiment with them.

Sample Card Prompts

Lecture Topic	Rank	Prompt
Library Website	Ace	You need to find out when the Library is open.
		You want to reserve a group study room for next week.
Ask a Librarian	2	You can't find the book you need on the shelf.
Catalog Searching	3	You want to find a book about violence in the media.
		You need to consult the Oxford English Dictionary.
Finding and Searching Databases	4	You are taking a psychology class, and your instructor told you to search PsychINFO for articles.
		You need to find articles about the most recent State of the Union Address.

After developing a set of topics to be addressed during the lecture, I ordered them by level of difficulty, beginning with the easiest, and matched them with one of the ranks found in a deck of cards (i.e. Ace, 2, 3, 4,…). I then wrote prompts for each level that addressed the corresponding lecture topic.
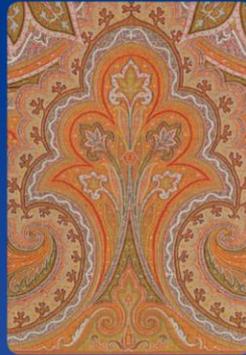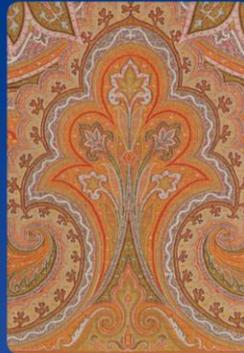
Once I decided on the content of the cards, I designed a template for resembling traditional playing cards. I assigned a suit to each card and cropped an image of paisley fabric from ARTstor to use on the reverse.

Here is one example.

Here is a second example.

Implementation

INFORMATION LITERACY CARDS IN ACTION

After introducing myself and the goals for the session, I walked around the room and asked students to draw a card from the deck.

Students were called to the front of the room based on the number and suit of the card they had drawn, asked to read the card to the class, and demonstrate what they would do if they were in that situation.

Sometimes I would ask follow-up questions. For example, the student drawing the card "You want to find a book about violence in the media" would search the catalog for those keywords, and I would ask how s/he would go about finding a very recent book, etc.
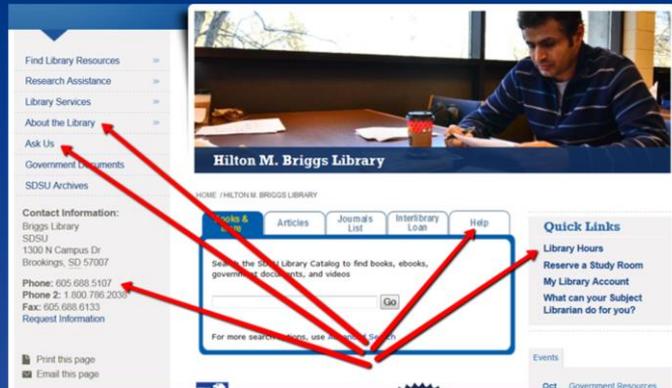
Along the way, I purposefully asked about or pointed out the multiple ways of successfully accomplishing their goal: there is rarely a single "right" way to find information. For example, there are several ways to find out when the library is open.

I approached those junctures as teachable moments, instead of instantly correcting students that ventured off the path I had planned. Consequently, each session was different from the others, though they all had similar content and the same collaborative atmosphere.

Reflection &
Reaction

SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

There were a couple bumps in the activity, many of which related to the number and type of questions on the playing cards, and I worked these problems out as I refined the questions and process throughout the week. Overall, though, I think the sessions accomplished their goal: to orient students to the library and its resources.

The instructors reacted favorably to my approach to the lecture, and though most students were also positive about the activity, there were some complaints.

Students' Thoughts

Since the content covered during this session was fairly similar to our introductory speech and English instruction sessions, it is not surprising that several students mentioned they had heard much of the information before. Some of them, however, mentioned this fact in order to comment on this session being different from or better than previous sessions.

Future Direction

WHAT NOW?

I have a couple ideas for further development.

One is to develop a full deck of cards addressing a variety of skills that can be used in any number of courses. Cards can then be selected from the full deck for use in a class based on the objectives of that instruction session.

I am also thinking about developing scenarios in order to provide a unifying framework for the questions and connect them more closely to students' situation and needs.

As I develop this activity further, I would also like to design a more effective assessment instrument, one that will allow me to determine how the activity itself affects student learning.