Library Services for Adult Learners:

Improving Information Literacy and Preventing Plagiarism

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Roadmap for our session

- Introduction to your presenters and our context
- Situational overview -- adult learners and information seeking/plagiarism
- Our observations
- Current practices
- BEST practices
- Possible routes forward
Our Campus and Context

Erin McArthur - Online Learning Librarian
- Reference and instruction, primarily exclusively online and hybrid programs

Ted Mulvey - Information Literacy Librarian
- Reference and instruction, primarily on-campus students

UW Oshkosh
- Comprehensive university, 13,955 FTE (2016-2017)
  - 66 undergraduate majors, 9 offered partially or 100% online
- 15% adult students (defined as age 25 or older) (undergraduates, 2017)
- Adult students primarily concentrated in online and continuing ed division

Polk Library information literacy instruction: approx. 400 classes/year
Situational Overview
Adult students’ challenges with information seeking

- Personal commitments and concerns cause stress, distraction
- Time constraints
- Discomfort with asking for help
- Discomfort with technology
- Preference for using personal resources
Adult students’ challenges with plagiarism

Adult students’ plagiarism rates are comparable to younger students’ (Jocoy & DiBiase, 2006)

Why do they plagiarize?

- Time constraints, possible additional pressures to attain certain grades (e.g. employer reimbursement for tuition)
- Lack of experience with academic writing and/or “broken educational journeys” (Hutchings, 2014) = struggles with referencing
Observations
Past interactions shape current expectations

- What’s the role of the librarian?
  - How is it different from the past?
  - What do we even do?

- Roadmap is preferred to “jumping in” (Badke, 2008)
Wait...I can get help? How?

- Polk Library’s current options for assistance:
  - In-person (appointment or walk-up)
  - By phone
  - Through 24/7 chat
  - Via email

- Far more likely to use phone or in-person options
  - Are we meeting the needs of adult learners with our assistance offerings?
How do I find the stuff I need?

- Similar to the librarian’s role, resources have changed

Typical struggles include:

- What do they search/do?
- What does this have to do with my assignment?
- How do I use this?
Online coursework

- Learning Management System woes
  - “Where do I log in?”
  - “Where’s my assignment!??”
  - “How do I talk to other people in my class?”
  - “You showed me how to research? Where are the databases again? I’m ON the website!!”
To cite or not to cite...

- **Attribution conventions**
  - Images
  - Paraphrasing
  - In-text quotations
  - Direct quotations

- **Citation styles**
  - What are they and why do they matter?
  - Lack of consistency
  - Many interactions are citation-related
Current Practices
Commercial plagiarism detection tools

Turnitin - most globally utilized

- Checks against Turnitin database (other student works, websites, journal articles) and provides “originality report”
- Integrated with some learning management systems (D2L, Canvas)
- Primarily a tool for detection, not prevention, however, can have deterrent effect
  - Importance of awareness -- when students know they are being monitored by Turnitin, rates of plagiarism are lower (Heckler, Rice, & Hobson, 2013)
Information literacy and anti-plagiarism instruction

Librarians use ACRL Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education - conceptual understandings about information, research, and scholarship

- “Information Has Value” - proper attribution and citation, intellectual property, copyright (ACRL, 2015)
- Majority of librarians believe teaching students about plagiarism is part of our role (Gibson & Chester-Fangman, 2010), however...
- Plagiarism/citations are often not included in library instruction due to time restraints, or because faculty are (supposedly?) covering the material
Campus policies

Institutions have honor codes or academic integrity policies

- Provide guidance to students and faculty and state consequences of plagiarism
- May include a tiered approach to discipline depending on severity of infraction
- Typically included on university website, often in syllabus, but...are often still confusing for students (terminology, rationale)
How do adult students learn best?

- Using life experiences (Merriam & Clark, 2006)
- Assignments that use life experience AND are engaging (Lindblom-Ylanne, 2010)
  - Reflective essays
  - Tangible evidence for personal development
  - Assignments relating to their lives
Research assignments

- “Process over product” (Sciammarella, 2009)
  - Multiple, shorter assignments emphasizing research process
  - Working bibliographies
  - Annotated bibliographies
  - Source evaluation
  - Metalearning
  - Real-life scenarios or situations
Moving Forward
Better plagiarism prevention education and student support

Explicit plagiarism instruction makes a difference -- DO SOMETHING!

- Students who got no instruction plagiarized more than 2x as often as those who did (Soto, Anand, & McGee, 2004)

Collaboration between librarians and faculty to teach about plagiarism, improve assignments

- In-class information literacy instruction explicitly focused on citations and plagiarism
  - May not be enough time -- time may be better spent on finding and evaluating sources
- “Passive” tutorials, videos websites, handouts
- Librarians can advise on creating better research assignments

Better support from librarians - flexible scheduling, online help
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