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CHAPTER 6

PRESSING THE RESET BUTTON ON (INFORMATION) LITERACY IN FYW

Opportunities for Library and Writing Program Collaboration in Research-Based Composition

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**Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.** The more things change, the more they stay the same. It’s a sentiment relevant in times of change in relations between university writing programs and libraries. With anything new comes a sense of *déjà vu*. Haven’t we been here before? We bear this sentiment in mind as we implement new models of collaboration between the first-year writing program and the library at Rutgers University–Camden. Much as we might wish to begin anew, we feel the tug of inertia. Still, we say, things will be different this time.

In this chapter, we report on efforts to reshape cocurricular cooperation following a change of leadership in our respective programs. This change comes at a time when new approaches to literacy and undergraduate research hold promise to invest writing, especially research-based writing, with renewed possibilities for student agency and success. These include a shift from outcomes and standards (in their focus on ends) to ecological models of development over time and in specific environments, as articulated in paradigm-breaking documents such as the 2015 Association of College and Research Libraries’ (ACRL) *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* and the 2011 Council of Writing Program Administrators’ (WPA) *Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing*. In light of local and national developments, we find it an opportune moment to hit the reset button on information literacy in first-year writing.

Like others working at the intersection of academic and information literacy, we come to our task aware of persistent challenges in teaching students “how to use the library,” especially in writing papers. We know the critiques, substantial and long-standing, leveled against the traditional research paper (Fister, 2011; Hood, 2010; Larson, 1982) extending back to Larson (1982) as a “non-form of writing” (p. 811) as well as arguments for its redeeming value (Brent, 2013). We identify as “pro” research, even in first-year composition, if not pro “research paper.” Indeed, we find arguments for undergraduate research as a high-impact educational practice (Kuh, 2008) compelling and begin our collaboration in the belief that first-year writing is foundational for experiences of research.

But first a bit of background. Librarian Zara Wilkinson and Associate Professor of English Bill FitzGerald came to positions of program leadership only recently. In fall 2015, Bill became the director of the Writing Program, whose home is the Department of English. Bill came to Rutgers–Camden in 2006 as a specialist in rhetoric and composition. Early in his career, Bill helped lead a large upper-level writing program at another university in a position that involved significant collaboration with library instructional staff. In 2016, Zara took over as coordinator of the Robeson Library’s instructional outreach to the Writing Program. Zara joined the Paul Robeson Library in 2012 as a reference and instruction librarian. Her liaison responsibilities include several Humanities departments, including English. Before assuming these new responsibilities at Rutgers–Camden, Zara and Bill applied their expertise on different sides of the equation to help students with research-based writing. Undergraduate research and mentoring has played a major role in Bill’s teaching for years. More recently, Bill (with Joseph Bizup) revised the classic guide, *The Craft of Research*, 4th ed., a text that makes heuristics of research accessible to novices.

Harnessing the untapped potential of research-based writing was central to Bill’s decision to direct the Writing Program for
Pressing the Reset Button on (Information) Literacy in FYW

Three years or longer. At Rutgers–Camden, first-year writing is a required two-course sequence, English 101 and English 102. Additionally, the preliminary courses of English 098 and English 099 support developing writers. The primary focus of English 101 is writing as argument; the primary focus of English 102 is writing as research. This basic structure did not change when Bill became director. However, the content of each course and the program’s relations with the library did.

Prior to fall 2015, both composition courses were largely theme-based, involving a mix of literary and nonliterary texts used as sites for analysis (in 101) or as a springboard for library-based research. In 101, typical assignments were largely skill based, for example, perform a close reading of a text, formulate a thesis-driven interpretation supported by textual evidence. Under this scenario, the library played no role; indeed, students might even be discouraged from relying on “outside” sources in their writing. By contrast, English 102 moved students from modes of argument (e.g., comparison/contrast) in an early assignment to a “research paper” incorporating at least three outside sources. Typically, papers were anchored in assigned course texts. Students would extend a theme in a research project. In this second-semester course, students came to the library for a “one-shot” instructional session after identifying a “topic” for an annotated bibliography, a precursor to a final paper. Under this syllabus, most students first encounter the library and librarians in late spring of the first year. (Large numbers of our students arrive as transfers, after completing composition courses at area community colleges.)

When Zara and Bill met in summer 2015 to discuss relations between the writing program and the library (though we knew each other already), library instruction was overseen by a longtime librarian near to retirement. As Bill walked his library colleagues through a new syllabus soon to be implemented, a basic consideration arose that was not front and center initially: When will students first come to the library and under what premises? It was illuminating for Bill to learn that though he had imagined a more robust approach to research in revamped comp courses, he hadn’t thought through the role of library instruction or, more broadly, the place of information literacy in the new curriculum. In the ensuing “pilot” year, Zara and Bill would frequently confer on more intentional collaboration than had previously been the case. If there is one difference between then and now, it is the insight that the writing program must work closely with the library to articulate and deliver on meaningful learning outcomes. Here, we sketch ongoing efforts to realize that objective in the near and long term.

Any writing program that defers “writing with sources” until late in a second semester misses opportunities to bring students into university life (Brent, 2013, p. 38) and risks a crucial loss of student engagement. Although correlation certainly does not equal causation, several recent studies have identified positive relationships between students’ use of the library and their academic success, particularly in their first year (Haddow & Joseph, 2010; Murray, Ireland, & Hackathorn, 2015; Soria, Fransen, & Nackerud, 2017). As one such study found, “library use—of any kind—was predictive of freshman-to-sophomore and sophomore-to-junior retention, with freshman library users being nine times more likely to be retained than nonusers” (Murray et al., 2015, p. 639). In devising new curricula, broader notions of academic and information literacy drive our
decisions on structuring and supporting writing assignments. In our new syllabi, students are introduced to the library in 101. In 102, students engage in research in ways that go beyond the bounds of the traditional research paper. In the next sections, we describe the role of library instruction and information literacy in our composition courses. We trace a change in focus from acquiring skills (e.g., distinguishing scholarly from popular sources, citing sources in a specific documentation style) to a more dynamic, rhetorical understanding of research as a form of engaging sources and readers in a conversation.

TO THE LIBRARY IN ENGLISH 101

A primary objective of college composition, we think, is to introduce students to the resources of academic libraries. But what notions of literacy govern this objective, which admittedly is not universal? Indeed, it’s possible to distinguish information literacy from other literacies, as we do to an extent when librarians, experts in information literacy, guide students through an instructional module on “library day.” It’s also possible to teach students to write from sources (rather than with sources) by integrating and citing source material, independent of finding or evaluating sources. We thus recognize possibilities for overlap as well as disjuncture between information literacy and academic literacy. As Bill and Zara discussed strategies for more intentional collaboration between the writing program and the library, this overlap became a site to intuit. In practical terms, it meant agreeing that students should visit the library in the first semester, in 101.

While this move may seem obvious, it was not immediately clear what broad ends it would serve. Students will go (or, depending on one’s perspective, come) to the library, but once there what will they do? Zara and Bill concluded that this initial visit would not be tied to a specific research task; rather, it would serve to orient students to the library itself as a hub for information. While there’s only so much that can be accomplished in a session lasting, often, just 50 minutes, decoupling a general introduction to the library from a focus on research has its advantages.

On the plus side, this orientation gives library instructional staff a full period to present the library on its own terms, with due attention to its range of resources. That range gets truncated when the goal of instruction is to move students swiftly to investigating a topic. At this point in their career, if they’ve been to the library at all, students may only be acquainted with computer terminals used for purposes other than research. In English 101, students are exposed to the library and to librarians without the stress of a major research assignment, providing an early opportunity to demonstrate that the library is a helpful, welcoming place. In her groundbreaking discussion of library anxiety, Constance A. Mellon (1986) encouraged librarians to emphasize helpfulness alongside library resources, allowing an instruction session to double as what she called a “warmth seminar” (p. 164). Of course, the flip side to getting students into the library ahead of a research task is that they benefit little from the exposure. It was thus important to stress that this initial visit in 101 was paired with a second visit in 102, when the focus would be on actual research.

The absence, historically, of a class-sponsored visit to the library for students in composition was something we sought to address squarely in a course redesign. We
were especially mindful that the composition sequence satisfied general education “foundational” requirements and was specifically dedicated to learning outcomes in information literacy. Beyond the immediate purposes of a writing course, Bill and Zara believed that 101 and 102 were committed to preparing students for information literacy expectations beyond the first year. Soria and colleagues (2017) found that those students who attended library classes “were more likely than their peers to earn a higher grade point average by the end of their fall semester” (p. 20). Similarly, “first-year students who used web-based library services (like electronic journals, databases, and the library website) were more likely than their peers to be engaged in academic activities, develop academic skills, focus on scholarly work, and have higher grade point averages” (p. 20). Whether these results reveal a cause of academic improvement or merely the habits of academically strong students, they suggest that introducing first-year students to the library and its services have benefits that may continue throughout their academic careers. Thus, the earlier that students have a hands-on experience with (and in) the library, the better.

In planning for fall 2015 and beyond, Zara and Bill decided that the new library orientation sessions for 101 would occur in weeks 8 through 11, or between late October and Thanksgiving break in fall semesters. This period coincides with the beginning of a series of linked assignments in 101 that anticipate a need for research but do not make research an end in itself. By this point in 101, students have completed three assignments, none requiring sources beyond assigned texts. For the remaining assignments, however, students are required to draw on source materials. The first of these linked assignments (“My Take”) is an open letter with a topic and an audience of a student’s choosing. To pen this letter, students must keep in mind that this same topic is the basis of the remaining two assignments. In the second of the linked units (“To Think That . . .”), students represent counterarguments to a position they voiced in their open letter. (They don’t write in feigned opposition; rather, they identify the grounds, or warrants, by which others may reasonably disagree.) For the final assignment (“Take Two”), students recast that open letter into an “academic” essay with evidence in support of claims and recognition of alternative perspectives. This remediated open letter is as a draft submission to The Scarlet Review, Rutgers–Camden’s undergraduate journal of first-year writing.

These last two assignments in 101 send students back to the library after their orientation session and propel them to consider a range of appropriate sources, scholarly or not. The linked units thus explore the nature of information and credibility. At the same time, students are not asked to produce a conventional research paper with a minimum number of sources or even master the mechanics of citation. Learning to properly cite sources in MLA or APA style is not a focus of the unit. Instead, they engage with sources as a step beyond taking a position in an effort to construct evidence-based arguments. Through examples and instructor-led exercises, students see how their civic arguments in an open letter are further shaped by expectations of academic standards of argument.

Neither Zara nor Bill think 101 is a satisfactory end for our students’ engagement with critical information literacy (Elmborg, 2006).
and academic research. Fortunately, the first course is an appropriate entry, and a base on which to build in a second semester.

**INTERLUDE: BETWEEN SEMESTERS**

In many ways, 102 echoes the assignment arc of 101. Students begin our second writing course with a turn to personal writing in a unit on literacy narratives. A second unit puts students in the role of researchers to produce a “profile of a discourse community.” A third unit, fully half the course, is devoted to a research project with several stages and deliverables. Finally, students complete a digital portfolio to showcase revised work across one or two semesters. The explicit and primary objective is to give every student an authentic experience of research.

To meet that objective, we conclude that there is no “one size fits all” approach to research, lest we devolve into teaching formulaic genres like the “research paper” whose implicit goal is to serve as a platform for demonstrating measurable skills. Like others, we wish to go “beyond mechanics” in the teaching of academic and information literacy (Margolin & Hayden, 2015). As collaborators in teaching research-based writing, Zara and Bill are influenced by pedagogical movements emphasizing the progression of learning in “communities of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1998) and the cultivation of distinct habits of mind over the acquisition of concrete skills. Such notions provide a common language to describe our goals and a common motive for collaboration.

In the discipline of writing studies (an alternative name for composition), the notion of “threshold concepts” has gained a foothold as a way to summarize the core understanding that separates novices from experts in a field (Meyer and Land, 2005). This notion suggests that in acquiring expert knowledge, whether driving a big rig, practicing law, or mastering an academic field, we pass through transformational stages that can be likened to crossing a threshold. Once learned, threshold concepts can’t be unlearned. Yet, while in the liminal space of learning, they are forms of “troublesome knowledge” confounding naive notions typically held by nonexperts (p. 377).

The notion of threshold concepts has energized writing studies in recent years. A recent book, *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing* (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015), gathers a team of writing studies scholars to crowdsource 37 core concepts—the disciplinary knowledge of the field. Under several major headings, these concepts animate the teaching of writing and the administration of writing programs. One macro-concept (1.0) is that “writing is a social and a rhetorical activity”; a related micro-concept (1.1) is that “writing is a knowledge-making activity.” Under a second macro-concept (2.0), “Writing speaks to situations through recognizable forms,” is a micro-concept (2.6), “Texts get their meaning from other texts.” These are working principles that those trained in writing studies bring to their profession. To some extent, those who learn to write successfully in any domain intuit variations on these principles even if they lack a vocabulary to express them. It is not that students in a given writing course must be taught these concepts explicitly. However, certain concepts can be introduced to demystify or correct notions that limit understanding or impede progress.

Thus, in teaching research-based writing, it helps for instructors to keep in mind that “writing is a knowledge-making activity” and not, as students may assume, a
knowledge-reporting activity. Misunderstand-
ing by students (or instructors) of the nature
of research as an act of knowledge creation
leads to formulaic efforts like the traditional
research paper. Yet once students see writing
as contributing to knowledge (if only, early
on, to their knowledge) they can move beyond
insipid forms aimed to show a teacher that
they have learned to find and represent infor-
mation. A focus on information-related skills
cannot in itself help students see the larger
paradigm of knowledge creation in which
such skills are productive tools. At issue in
writing pedagogy across the K–16 spectrum
is to what extent skills can be learned inde-
dependently of the spheres in which they are
productive.

As Zara and Bill have discovered, similar
constructs are shaping their respective fields.
In information literacy, the Framework for
Information Literacy for Higher Education,
adopted by the Association of College and
Research Libraries (ACRL), likewise recog-
nizes threshold concepts as instrumental for
learning. The Framework posits six “frames”:
(1) Authority Is Constructed and Textual,
(2) Information Creation as a Process, (3)
Information Has Value, (4) Research as
Inquiry, (5) Scholarship as Conversation,
(6) Searching as Strategic Exploration. For
each frame, the document identifies “knowl-
edge practices” and “dispositions” integral
to that frame. For example, included under
Research as Inquiry are these knowledge
practices: the ability to “formulate questions
for research based on information gaps or on
reexamination of existing, possibly conflict-
ing, information; determine an appropriate
scope of investigation [and] deal with com-
plex research by breaking complex questions
into simple ones.” Equally important are
dispositions associated with a given frame.

Again under Research as Inquiry, the ACRL
text asserts that “learners who are developing
their information literate abilities” must “con-
sider research as open-ended exploration and
engagement with information; appreciate that
a question may appear to be simple but still
disruptive and important to research; value
intellectual curiosity in developing questions
and learning new investigative methods” and
six additional habits of mind, such as “per-
sistence” and “intellectual humility,” or incli-
nations, such as “seek appropriate help when
needed” or “follow ethical and legal guide-
lines” (Framework).

These dispositions find an analog in a
similarly titled document in writing instruc-
tion, Framework for Success in Postsecondary
Writing, produced jointly by the Council of
Writing Program Administrators (CWPA),
the National Council of Teachers of English
(NCTE), and the National Writing Project
(NWP). This 2011 text considers notions of
college readiness with an emphasis on nec-
essary “habits of mind,” including curiosity,
persistence, creativity, and flexibility, with
such habits to be fostered through “writ-
ing, reading, and critical analysis.” As in
the ARCL’s Framework, the objective is not
to teach specific concepts but to chart how
learners move from peripheral participation
to more central participation in communi-
ties of practice. They do so by naturalizing
relevant knowledge practices and normaliz-
ing relevant dispositions. This process takes
time, but not just time. It also takes deliberate
scaffolding and some explicit teaching of con-
cepts. Especially, we think, it takes carefully
designed learning experiences that bring stu-
dents into the liminal spaces of the activity
systems in which critical threshold concepts
like “information has value” and “writing is a
knowledge-making activity” are experienced.
Overall, Bill and Zara endorse the “frameworks” approach to information literacy and writing instruction. In particular, we find the notion of threshold concepts useful in imagining the potential for instruction to spur development in multiple literacies. But a commitment to a model of learning does not lead directly to a curriculum, let alone to collaboration between writing instructors and librarians. Enacting a shared vision of literacy instruction depends on multiple factors, not least on finding ways to “bureaucratize” that vision with forms for collaboration. In most respects, this burden lies with writing programs to (1) fashion a course of study responsive to literacy expectations implicit in constructs of “information” and “research,” and (2) reach out to the library as a partner in pedagogy.

At Rutgers–Camden, as we have noted, literacy and research are foregrounded, with specific units in 102 giving students opportunities to engage with their own literacy development and “real” research. There’s a risk that such opportunities will be missed, given the challenge of moving learning and instruction from well-trod paths. There are reasons why the traditional research paper and one-shot library session persist, despite recognized limitations, just as there are reasons to worry that changes to these institutional staples will be largely superficial. We recognize the challenge of change.

The most visible change at the level of collaboration is a decision to require two instructional visits to the library, the first in 101 and the second in 102. If the goal in 101 is to bring students to the library as part of a broad commitment to information literacy, the goal in 102 is to move students beyond exposure and toward specific research-oriented goals. This goal is a work in progress, but a commitment to dialogue and collaboration is instrumental to meeting it. For maintaining an instructional partnership is just the beginning of a process to discern how best to support the overlapping domains of information literacy, writing, and undergraduate research. Zara and Bill recognize that the mere fact of a second instructional visit to “do research” is no guarantee of advancement. At issue is what broader learning goals are served by aligning writing instruction with information literacy. Bill and Zara agreed it was necessary to go “beyond the research paper” in 102 if larger literacy goals were to be met.

At a distance, our “new” library instruction in 102 looks much like the old. Early in the third unit (dedicated to research), roughly mid-semester, students come to the library to hone search strategies and vetting strategies for information they find. Guided by library staff, they learn to distinguish “degrees” of sources (primary, secondary, tertiary) and scholarly from popular sources. At this time, they are introduced to specialized databases and other reference tools and to the notion of “bread crumbs” in using one source to locate others. Ideally, students come to see research as an iterative process, rather than a linear one, in moving from a topic to a research question to an arguable claim supported by available evidence. By this effort, we hope students go beyond thinking of research as simply providing backup for positions they already hold but lack the authority to claim on their own.

Our approach uses terms and strategies from The Craft of Research (Booth, Colomb, Williams, & Bizup, 2016), a text that puts
research into the context of contributing to an ongoing, critical conversation, if not necessarily an academic one. Bill (with Joe Bizup) recently updated this classic guide, and it serves as a foundational text in 102. Our intention is to teach not the research paper, but research process. This process includes writing up the results of research to share with a community of readers, ideally an audience beyond the instructor, as well as practices of inquiry and “engaging sources” (a chapter title in Craft).

To be clear, this understanding of the research process doesn’t just happen after one or more instructional sessions. For it to occur, the model of research that shapes our curriculum must actively push against reductive notions embodied in the “school genre” of the research paper, with a prescribed number of “outside” sources (though never Wikipedia) and a slate of predictable topics (Bean, 1996). The research paper, in untold numbers across disciplines, is conceived by both students and instructors as a simulacrum suitable for learning the mechanics of research for use one day, perhaps, in real research. So conceived, the fruits of information literacy wither on the vine; “research” becomes a desultory ticking of boxes: scholarly journal, check; MLA format, check.

Note again our words of caution (to ourselves) that begin this essay. Zara and Bill, like our counterparts elsewhere, cannot simply ordain that meaningful practices of research and information literacy take root. Even the sage advice in The Craft of Research cannot easily prevent superficial approaches to “source-based writing” (Howard, Serviss, & Rodrigue, 2010, p. 188). The Citation Project found that students in first-year writing engage secondary sources quite superficially, typically referencing material only from the first few pages of a source and rarely employing summary in favor of quotation, acceptable and unacceptable paraphrase (Jamieson, Howard, & Serviss, 2010).

We make no bold claims of success; we only express a desire to embed notions of literacy in a more expansive, and ecological, framework than our previous models. We do so to promote a rhetorical sensibility in our students, a disposition to perceive oneself as having agency in one’s learning and within a broader sphere of social action. Bill and Zara see our task as at once academic and civic in import: to introduce students to practices and habits of mind of the university and to underscore their own participation (and the university’s participation) in a wider ecology, not just as consumers of knowledge but contributors as well.

Make no mistake, we’re talking about first-year students; much professionalizing lies ahead. All the more reason to engage a flow of ideas and discourse that is not narrowly focused in academic disciplines but oriented to norms of civic argument. We concur with Wardle (2009), who maintains that the research paper in first-year composition does not help students meet future disciplinary norms. We do not place those hopes in the research-based writing we sponsor in 101 and 102. The broader engagement we imagine involves, as we have noted, a more expansive approach to research than is typically experienced in a first-year writing course in the form of “going to the library.” In implementing principles articulated in both “frameworks” texts for our programs, we look to curricular and pedagogical decisions that put research front and center.

At a curricular level, perhaps the most significant intervention is the creation of the unit “Profile of a Discourse Community”
as the second major project of 102. In this ethnographic unit, students engage in various types of primary research to investigate a community to which they belong or otherwise have access. They observe, collect materials, interview members, and conduct surveys to better understand how their object of study is a discourse community, and hence uses modes and genres of communication (text, talk, and other media) to further its objectives. The assignment puts students into the role of “researcher,” applying definitions from Swales (1990), Gee (1989), and others in ways that foreground their agency as contributors to knowledge. To produce this 5–6 page essay, they learn to pose a research question (why is this group a discourse community?) and apply methods of data collection and analysis. They learn to recognize expertise and authority and to sort out conflicting accounts in data they collect. Indeed, they learn to transform information (assembled through fieldwork) into evidence that supports their reading of a cultural practice. The assignment underscores the fact that research, understood as a practice of systematic inquiry accountable to communal norms, is something that students can do and, indeed, have already done before they begin the third unit of 102, focused on research.

This third unit returns students to a more familiar stance of research in dialogue with sources largely obtained through libraries and the Internet. (But other approaches are possible.) By now, however, they have conducted primary research in a focused inquiry emphasizing the ACRL frame Information Has Value. The (re)turn to secondary research likewise reinforces notions of Scholarship as Conversation (Framework) rather than underscores implicit dependence on authoritative sources to make one’s argument. Here, we can turn to several optional texts that extend the structure of inquiry articulated in Craft of Research. In particular, many instructors continue to use They Say/I Say (Graff, Birkenstein, & Durst, 2006) for its advice on how to engage with source material. (This text was required in the previous version of 102.) Some instructors turn to “BEAM: A Rhetorical Vocabulary for Teaching Research-Based Writing” to help students understand what roles the sources they engage can play in their own arguments: B(ackground), E(xhibit), A rgument), and M(ethod) (Bizup, 2008). Bizup’s heuristic, applied to an intermediate assignment of an annotated bibliography summarizing four to eight sources, helps to minimize the “cherry picking” of convenient material from sources in favor of more strategic models of dialogue.

We hope that students find themselves in “threshold” spaces where they begin to see research and inquiry as forms of conversation among agents with differing motives, subjectivities, and degrees of expertise. Ideally, they approach the tasks in this unit and the course as a whole through the construct of apprenticeship. This is an invitation we can’t expect students to accept fully at this early stage, however. Most will remain in at best a liminal state, still attached to notions and identities that mark them as outsiders to academic discourse, yet perhaps open to the value of research as a door-opening skill set. Breakthrough moments occur when students see themselves as novices on a path to expertise.

When students return to the library for that second instructional session in 102, after their first visit in 101, they’ve already engaged in independent research and have read early chapters of The Craft of Research. Especially, they’ve considered the essential progression of research—from topic to question...
to problem (i.e., a question that others also want answered) to sources—that structures *The Craft of Research*. Our students come to the library soon after they’ve identified a topic and begun to formulate a research question (Nutefall & Ryder, 2010). We hope that both classroom and library instruction take students beyond “finding information on a topic” to the ACRL frame Searching as Strategic Exploration.

Here, even the best-laid plans go awry, as inexperienced researchers confront the complexities and constraints, or “mess,” of research (Rickly, 2007). In truth, there’s little time in a semester for students to gain adequate expertise on any topic, make sense of a surfeit of information, and contribute substantially to a conversation. It can take years in many cases. It can be hard to spot bias and reliability in information to mount informed arguments on complex issues. At best, students can agree or disagree with some claims. We have no illusions that students can avoid entirely the many pitfalls on the road to information literacy. Yet we also think well-supported students can succeed, in the main, through heuristics for problem-posing and problem-solving in the context of information literacy and rhetorical approaches to argumentation.

An aid to reaching these goals is stronger collaboration between writing instructors and their library counterparts. Zara and Bill further concluded that a missing element in relations prior to our involvement was dialogue ahead of a class visit. Often, a cleavage exists between the writing class instructor and library instruction. Bill and Zara decided that several weeks before a scheduled visit, instructors will meet with library instructional staff to discuss the design and pace of their course. This meeting determines where students will be in their projects when they arrive for group instruction; what follow-up assignments, including one-on-one consultations with library staff, are anticipated; and what emphases would be ideal. In effect, each composition sequence requires three visits to the library, one in 101 and two in 102, including one for the instructor.

A year into this effort, we are working to maximize the potential for productive dialogue. There are issues of turnover and training, but it’s clear that exploring research and information literacy goals with library staff is a net gain because learning goals are more tightly integrated into the course. Beyond this, a need for tailored instruction follows from increasingly varied approaches to research in 102. Some instructors focus on archival research or quantitative literacy. Others extend the research activities of the second unit, on discourse communities, into the third unit. Still others are thinking through a range of alternative genres in the direction of “multiwriting” (Davis & Shadle, 2007). As a whole, the program is moving beyond the 8–10 page academic essay and toward diverse ways of engaging and representing information. These include opportunities to compose and circulate texts in digital environments. The default deliverable in 102 is still a research report of some kind, but we anticipate other modes of contributing to knowledge through multimodal compositions.

The final unit of 102 is not the researched essay or its variants, however, but a digital portfolio in which the work of 102 (and optionally 101) is re-presented in digital form; we use Wordpress as a platform. In the portfolio, students revise or expand on their work as well as reflect on their growth as writers and researchers. Like the final essay in 101 that might appear online in a journal of undergraduate writing, the portfolio contributes to
students’ development of digital and media literacies and to their identity as agents writing beyond the audience of a teacher. Students are introduced to the portfolio at the beginning of 102 and encouraged to take advantage of the affordances of digital media, including linking to information sources where possible. In this way, digital literacy reinforces information literacy within a larger framework of civic and academic literacies.

CONCLUSION: PARTNERS IN PEDAGOGY

Bill and Zara embrace (uncommonly, we think) a common vision of pedagogy and partnership of great practical benefit to our students and colleagues. Behind the scenes of instruction in the classroom and the library, we’re working not for the cause of efficiency (much as we value it) but for moments of discovery as yet unrealized by students and instructors who must complete the program of study we anticipate for them, coloring inside (or outside) lines we have drawn. We have built up traffic between our programs with increased visits and consultations, ensuring that students receive scaffolded support in what can be a gaping hole in their education. Information literacy falls between the cracks of formal education. Not owned by any discipline, it is an infrastructure for content-based instruction. In this, it forms an essential bond with writing programs, invested as each are in equipping students to participate in the academy and beyond. The more vibrant and substantive the encounter with information, the nearer students come to realizing their potential as agents in the knowledge economy.

Beyond a more vibrant partnership, then, Zara and Bill are creating a model of collaboration between the writing program and the library that’s anything but static in engaging students in transformative learning experiences. In the 21st century, this means going beyond the research paper as an academic exercise. It means pushing students into the flow of information through emerging forms of academic and civic participation; it means outfitting students with critical literacy skills to interrogate, even resist, information and to recognize the distributed nature of information in networked ecologies.

Still in the early days of a partnership, Bill and Zara are solidifying collaboration through appropriate assessment of instruction and products of that instruction. Together, Zara and Bill will look for opportunities to build on success and address deficits, in ways as simple as sharing student work with library colleagues. Bill and Zara further recognize that this partnership plays a vital role in the broader mission of the university. Beyond immediate goals of instruction, the library’s relationship with the writing program serves as a catalyst for change in a vertical curriculum. We see ourselves accountable to our colleagues for what we do to sustain a model of instruction grounded in notions of threshold concepts, for the “threshold” is very much an elongated portal through which students traverse, at varying rates, in the course of their education.

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