

# **Congressman Frank J. Guarini Library Information Literacy One Minute Survey Evaluation Report April 2009**

## **Introduction**

Like our academic colleagues nationwide, librarians at the Congressman Frank J. Guarini Library have long been interested in measuring the impact of library instruction on student learning. In recent years, this interest has been underscored by our accrediting body's emphasis on information literacy. Information and technology literacy has also been identified as a learning outcome for NJCU students and is included in Vision 2010, the university's strategic plan. The library has experimented with several methods of assessment but to date none have focused on student learning. In 2004-2005 we surveyed distance learning faculty and students to learn more about their library usage and to solicit feedback in order to improve services. The following year we conducted a campus-wide survey of faculty and student library use, which resulted in implementation and expansion of library services. This latest attempt to gather data from students about their own learning following a library instruction session is a natural outgrowth of these earlier efforts. This report details our experience administering a brief self-report instrument following library instruction sessions.

## **Background and Overview**

Librarians at New Jersey City University have been providing bibliographic instruction for several decades. As the result of a major renovation, the library has housed a state-of-the-art instructional classroom since 1999. It contains 38 computers for students plus an instructor's station. Professors request instruction via email, phone or web form, and Toby Heyman, Instruction Coordinator, schedules and assigns approximately 200 sessions each year. Session length ranges from 50 minutes to 2 ½ hours, and Toby encourages professors to bring their classes for longer sessions to ensure adequate time for hands-on practice.

Most library instruction sessions share three elements: an overview and demonstration of OSCAR, the library's online catalog and multidisciplinary databases (Academic Search Premier and Wilson OmniFile) in addition to mention of the various ways to get help within the library and offsite. Librarians also demonstrate discipline specific databases and print resources as appropriate. Librarians work with professors to tailor sessions to specific needs.

## **Method**

During the 2006-2007 academic year, led by the Instruction Coordinator, librarians devised a short evaluation instrument to be given to students following library instruction sessions. The Minute Survey, as its name implies, should only take a minute to complete. The instrument was kept short to increase its chances of completion. While we wanted to gather meaningful data, we had to balance that with the reality of the situation: a longer instrument might prove burdensome to students. Librarians were encouraged to distribute the Minute Survey following each instruction session they conducted, but participation was voluntary. Some librarians passed completed Minute Surveys on to the library director. Forms analyzed for this study were those submitted to the library director.

During the fall 2007 semester, each minute survey response was typed into one document for easier categorization and analysis. Since the survey consisted of nearly 2,000 individual responses, this was a tremendously time-intensive process. Categories were created in a fairly straightforward way, i.e. in most cases it was quite easy to group items into self-explanatory categories, for instance by resource, service or

skill mentioned. The category Other was created for items with less than a set number of instances or which could not be clearly categorized. The document containing all responses is available from the author.

## **Results**

### *Survey Participants*

563 students from 52 classes completed a Minute Survey. This number represents 18.9% of students who received information literacy instruction during 2006-2007. Of the respondents, 456 (80.1%) were undergraduates and 107 (19.9%) were graduate students. Table 1 shows the classes with which they came to the library.

**Table 1**

| <b>Department</b>   | <b># of Students</b> |
|---|----------------------|
| Education (Grad and Undergrad)  | <b>168</b>           |
| Writing Courses (includes English I, English II, College Writing, Reading & Study Skills) | <b>161</b>           |
| FYE   | <b>70</b>            |
| Health (Grad and Undergrad)   | <b>32</b>            |
| Psychology  | <b>28</b>            |
| Nursing   | <b>25</b>            |
| Civilizations I and II  | <b>19</b>            |
| Business  | <b>13</b>            |
| English (Children's Literature)   | <b>13</b>            |
| Computer and Information Science (Microcomputers & Programming)                           | <b>12</b>            |
| Art/Art Education   | <b>10</b>            |
| Women and Gender Studies (Intro to Lesbian & Gay Studies)                                 | <b>9</b>             |
| Math  | <b>3</b>             |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>563</b>           |

The majority of surveys completed were by students in education, writing or FYE courses. This is not surprising since it is in these courses that students are usually required to produce at least one research paper. Thus, it is in these courses that instructors usually acknowledge the need for library instruction. However, since the survey represents less than one fifth of students who received library instruction, this class breakdown may not be representative of the total population of classes that came to the library during the academic year.

### *Survey Instrument*

The minute survey consists of four questions:

1. Briefly list a few things you learned during the library orientation.
2. Was there anything about the library orientation that you particularly liked?
3. Was there anything about the library orientation that you did not like?
4. Any other comments or questions about the library would be greatly appreciated!

### *Survey Results by Question*

#### *Question 1: Briefly list a few things you learned during the library orientation.*

The first question required students to briefly list a few things they learned during the library orientation. The majority of students listed three or fewer items. Most students (559 out of 563) reported a positive learning outcome. Students reported learning a total of 860 items, which included information about library resources, services, and policies. Only three students said they had not learned anything and one wrote, "everything is fine." Table 2 shows the list of items mentioned with their percentage breakdown.

Table 2

| Items Learned                 | Times Mentioned | % of Total    |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Databases                     | 290             | 33.7%         |
| OSCAR and books               | 190             | 22.1%         |
| General                       | 127             | 14.8%         |
| Search Strategies             | 86              | 10.0%         |
| How to find journals/articles | 52              | 6.0%          |
| Policies/Procedures/Layout    | 23              | 2.7%          |
| Citation Styles               | 22              | 2.6%          |
| Offsite Access                | 15              | 1.7%          |
| Getting Help                  | 14              | 1.6%          |
| Periodicals List A to Z       | 12              | 1.4%          |
| Other                         | 29              | 3.4%          |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>860</b>      | <b>100.0%</b> |

The most frequently mentioned item was databases reported by 290 students (51.5%). Students said they learned how to use, search, access, select, choose, go to and research databases. 50% of these students (146) mentioned specific databases. Table 3 shows the 28 specific databases they mentioned. The most frequently mentioned were EBSCO/Academic Search Premier (35), Wilson OmniFile Full Text Mega (16), ERIC (12), PsycINFO/PsycARTICLES (11), Facts on File (10) and Grove Art Online (8). Ten students said they learned about specific database features including adding to folders, article linker and printing/emailing or saving articles.

Table 3

| Databases Mentioned            |            |                                  |
|--------------------------------|------------|----------------------------------|
| EBSCO Academic Search Premier  | 35         | Grove Music 3                    |
| Wilson Omnifile Full Text Mega | 16         | Kraus Curriculum Center 3        |
| ERIC                           | 12         | MLA International Bibliography 3 |
| PsycINFO/PsycARTICLES          | 11         | Literature Resource Center 3     |
| Facts on File History          | 10         | ACM 2                            |
| Grove Art                      | 8          | InfoTrac 1                       |
| United Streaming               | 6          | Literature Online 1              |
| Lexis Nexis                    | 5          | Medline 1                        |
| Opposing Viewpoints            | 5          | Net Library 1                    |
| WorldCAT                       | 5          | Novelist 1                       |
| CINAHL                         | 4          | ProQuest Psychology Jnls 1       |
| Education Full Text            | 4          | Oxford English Dictionary 1      |
| ProQuest Education Journals    | 3          | World Book Online 1              |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>124</b> | <b>Total 22</b>                  |

Learning to use OSCAR to find books was the second most frequently mentioned item, identified by 190 students (33.79%). In addition to learning to search OSCAR to find books, students also mentioned learning to locate books on the shelf by call numbers and how to get information about books using the catalog.

The third most frequently mentioned item was not as straightforward as the first two and includes a variety of responses. 127 students (22.5%) made general or vague comments about what they had learned. Responses in this category did not include mentions of specific resources, such as databases, catalogs, or search

strategies. Instead, these responses included words like research, information, resources, sources, materials, library web site and online library. Table 4 shows a breakdown of items placed in this category.

**Table 4**

| <b>General Items Learned</b> |            |
|------------------------------|------------|
| Sources/Resources/Materials  | 21         |
| How to do research           | 20         |
| How to find information      | 19         |
| Library web site or homepage | 15         |
| Online Library               | 15         |
| Topics/Subjects              | 11         |
| How to use the library       | 7          |
| Vague or broad               | 19         |
| <b>Total</b>                 | <b>127</b> |

Responses characterized as vague included the following: one student said he/she learned to “use the equipment,” while another learned to “use the corses at home”. Two mentioned the NJ Home Library Center, and another said he/she had learned to browse the web.

In contrast to students who reported general learning outcomes, 86 students (15.3%) reported learning specific search strategies. These included learning to truncate, to narrow or broaden a search, to use Boolean operators, to limit to full-text, peer-reviewed or scholarly articles, to use the thesaurus, to understand the differences between keyword and subject searching, and to search several databases simultaneously using EZ search.

The next most frequently learned item was how to find articles or journals, reported by 52 students (9.3%). Students in this category reported learning to find, access, search for, look for and use articles or journals. 27 students (4.8%) said they learned about different search engines and web sites, but some of these responses suggest they may have been referring to databases or OSCAR. 23 students (4.1%) reported learning about various library policies, procedures and resources including library hours, loan periods, fines, interlibrary loan procedures, library layout, and reciprocal borrowing arrangements.

The next most frequently reported item was citation and bibliography: 22 students (3.9%) reported learning to use APA or MLA style to cite sources and write papers. A few students said they had learned how to find the citation guide on the library’s web site. 15 students (2.7%) reported learning about off-site access, and 14 students (2.5%) said they learned how to get help within the library or offsite by various means including QandA NJ. 12 students (2.1%) mentioned learning to use the Periodicals List A to Z.

Items mentioned seven or fewer times were placed into an other category, which contained 29 items. This category includes 7 students who mentioned learning about a specific topic as a result of the session. These were: African Empire, Internet 2, global warming, and Patrick O’Brian. Another 7 students mentioned learning the differences between pdf and html formats. The remaining 15 students mentioned a variety of items including web site evaluation, plagiarism, the cost of resources, specific resources (a health encyclopedia for instance), the online resources subject guide and links to online tutorials.

It is interesting to note that the most commonly used phrase in the responses was “how to”: 444 responses (78.9%) contained this phrase, which suggests that the sessions were important to students because they

learned “how to do” something. This is not surprising since most sessions include ample time for hands-on practice. Students used 54 verbs following “how to” and the most frequent were: use, search, access, find, get, narrow, look for, look up and locate. The next most frequent were: do, navigate, limit, go to, operate, log on, print, make, work, view, browse, cite and refine. The following verbs were used only once: pick, conduct, surf, broaden, organize, begin, gain, write, determine, launch, best exploit, request, add, input, abbreviate, contact, start searching, figure out, specify, focus, become more familiar with, make sure, e-mail articles, store, save, be able to look at, combine, and research.

In summary, students reported learning a variety of items, which closely reflect the basic resources and concepts covered in information literacy classes. Students reported learning how to use databases and the online catalog, how to do research, use the library web site and online resources, how to find articles and online journals and more. Most students (99.3%) who attended an information literacy session reported learning something. These results provide evidence of the value of the library’s instruction program and the need for instruction in basic library skills.

*Question 2: Was there anything about the library orientation that you particularly liked?*

In Question 2 we tapped into the affective dimension of instruction and asked students to tell us what they had liked about the orientation. 48 students (8.5%) said they had liked everything or “all of it” and 49 students (8.7%) said they had not liked anything or left this section blank. The remaining 466 students (82.8%) reported particularly liking a large number of items including resources, the librarian, presentation attributes, teaching methods, and skills they learned (see Table 5).

**Table 5**

| <b>Items Liked</b> | <b>Times Mentioned</b> |
|--------------------|------------------------|
| Library Resources  | 138                    |
| Librarian          | 98                     |
| Session Attributes | 79                     |
| Teaching Methods   | 44                     |
| Library Services   | 37                     |
| New Skills         | 30                     |
| Technology         | 22                     |
| Other              | 18                     |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>466</b>             |

138 students (29.6%) mentioned that they liked learning about library resources and the resource most often cited was databases, by 68 students. 32 students mentioned a wide variety of resources including journals, articles, web sites and resources in general. 18 students said they particularly liked learning about OSCAR and 20 mentioned “the information”. 6 students said they liked learning about citations and 4 said the orientation handouts were helpful.

The second most liked aspect of the orientation was the librarian, mentioned by 98 students. Students referred to the librarian using many words including presenter, instructor, teacher, educator, speaker, person-in-charge, facilitator, “the lady”, representative, orientator, mentor, “the woman” and he or she. Several students referred to the librarian by name. Students praised librarians for being friendly, approachable, helpful, thorough, clear, informative, nice, patient, attentive, eager to help, efficient, cooperative, and knowledgeable. They also noted the librarians’ willingness to answer questions and provide one-to-one attention.

Closely paralleling praise of librarians were positive evaluations of presentation attributes. 36 students said the orientation was clear, easy to understand or easy to follow and that the material and processes had been well explained. 22 students said it had been helpful and informative and 9 appreciated that it was thorough and detailed. 12 students mentioned other attributes including use of humor and logical and concise delivery.

44 students mentioned liking teaching methods. Of these, 28 liked that they were given time for hands-on practice following the lecture and 16 mentioned liked that the presenter demonstrated how to do things “step-by-step”. 37 students liked learning about library services including off-site access (27), QandA NJ (5), free printing in the classroom (5), ways to get help (3) and reciprocal borrowing (2). 30 students liked learning new skills: 24 mentioned learning new search strategies and 6 mentioned learning to do research. 22 students said they liked the technology including the computer set up in the classroom and Altiris. The remaining students liked a variety of orientation aspects including that the resources were easy to find (12) and the tour (6).

In summary, students liked learning about resources, they appreciated the librarians, liked the way the orientation was presented and found it clear, easy to understand, helpful and informative. They also appreciated learning about library services and acquiring new skills. 82.8% of students who attended an orientation found something about it to like and several students liked more than one aspect of the orientation.

*Question 3: Was there anything about the library orientation that you did not like?*

Question three required students to tell us about aspects of the orientation that they had not liked. Students are usually reluctant to provide negative feedback, and this survey was no exception. 403 students (71.5%) left this section blank or wrote some version of no (including nothing, not really, n/a, not at all, etc). 66 students (11.7%) used this section to make a positive statement about the session. 90 students (15.9%) listed an item in this section (see Table 6).

**Table 6**

| <b>Items Not Liked</b>  | <b>Times Mentioned</b> |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Session Length          | 20                     |
| Librarian attributes    | 11                     |
| Pace of session         | 10                     |
| Not enough hands-on     | 9                      |
| Too many prior sessions | 7                      |
| Room temperature        | 6                      |
| Specific resources      | 6                      |
| Too much information    | 5                      |
| Other                   | 16                     |
| <b>Total</b>            | <b>90</b>              |

The most frequently disliked aspect of instruction was session length, mentioned by 20 students. 13 felt that the session had been too long and 7 felt it had been too short. The next most frequently mentioned item was librarian attributes or behaviors. This included mentions of the librarian being hard to understand due to an accent or speaking too softly, arriving late to the session, not mentioning offsite access to databases and not giving enough examples to illustrate points covered. 10 students mentioned the pace of the session and felt it had been too quick. 9 students objected to either no hands-on following the lecture or not enough time for

hands-on practice. 7 students did not appreciate the orientation because they had attended too many prior sessions and another 6 mentioned the room temperature, most saying it was too hot. 6 students said they didn't like specific resources and these included: "the chat rooms", the "bunny experiment", Lexis Nexis and Academic Search Premier. 5 students felt that the session suffered from "too much information" and said they felt overwhelmed.

The 16 items placed in the other category included students getting lost during searches and not being able to find enough on their topics, being bored, getting back pain from sitting for too long, having to pay for paper, not having had the session earlier in the semester and being distracted by classmates and professor asking too many questions.

Many disliked aspects of instruction were things that can't be controlled by individual librarians. Room temperature or session length, for instance, are outside of the control of librarians. However, there are a few items that librarians can control and might want to focus on. Since a few students objected to little time for hands on practice, librarians should always attempt to include hands-on, even if the session is short. Also, since some students may feel overwhelmed by too much information and have a hard time finding information on their topics, librarians should strive to offer personalized assistance whenever possible.

*Question 4: Any other comments or questions about the library would be greatly appreciated!*

The final question was an open-ended invitation for comments or questions. 293 students (52%) did not have anything to add in this section, but 270 (48%) made a comment or asked a question. Their comments were largely positive.

154 students reported enjoying the orientation and used positive words to describe it. Students said it was good, great, excellent, helpful, useful, informative and wonderful. A few students said it was the best orientation they had had; two students referred to it as awesome. Several students felt the orientation should be required for all freshmen or graduate students and one student said "every class should incorporate how to use NJCU info technology." Students also thanked us and said several versions of good job, including great job, good work, great work and keep up the good work.

49 students had praise for the librarian who conducted the session and 13 mentioned a specific librarian. Students used several words to refer to the librarian including host, hostess, teacher, instructor, the lady, assistant, presenter and orientator. Students praised librarians for being clear, detailed, thorough, patient, kind, well-prepared, informative, helpful and good teachers.

20 students used this section to make a positive comment about the library. They said it was clean, well-organized, calm, user friendly, helpful and an excellent resource. One student summed up this section nicely by saying: the library rocks!

17 students suggested changes or additions to library services including that we should open a Starbucks in the lobby, that we should subscribe to JSTOR, install Word and Excel on all the pcs, get more books about Jackie Robinson, stay open later during finals and midterms, allow students to check out videos, not charge for paper and have more student aids and individual help in the library.

13 students made suggestions for future sessions or commented on the classroom environment. One student said the glass desktops needed to be cleaned, another said the librarian should use a microphone, yet another wished the orientation had included a tour and an opportunity to learn to find books on the shelf. One student wanted a longer session, another wanted us to make it more interesting and a third said she wished we had covered things that are just taken for granted.

Overall student comments and suggestions were thoughtful and appreciative and indicate ability and willingness to share thoughts and experiences.

### **Discussion**

Responses to the Minute Survey suggest that students learned a great deal about library resources and services and were satisfied with the library orientation. Students praised the orientations and said they were helpful, informative, thorough and detailed. They also praised librarians and referred to them as kind, helpful, knowledgeable and informative. These results clearly show that students who attended library instruction sessions feel that they learned how to access and use library resources including the catalog and databases from offsite and that the knowledge they gained will help them succeed in their coursework. The results of this survey provide empirical support for the value of library orientation sessions and information literacy instruction.

An additional striking result is the staggering variety of items mentioned by the group. The diverse ways in which the students expressed what they had learned points to several issues that deserve attention. Learners are unique and perceive learning situations in idiosyncratic ways. In addition, information literacy acquisition is not a linear process, and students can take quite some time to put all the pieces together. The results of this survey offer us only a snapshot, a glimpse of a point in time in their learning. The responses clearly show varying levels of sophistication within the same class. Teaching faculty is well-acquainted with the challenges of working with students of varying abilities and skill levels, and librarians are also familiar with this phenomenon. The results of this survey point to these differences clearly. Students who attended the same instructional session say they learned different things, or expressed learning the same things in very different ways.

The large number of variations in word usage point not only to the richness of the English language but may also indicate the various ways in which students conceptualize what they have learned. This diversity of expression may point to diverse mental models and learning styles, which need to be understood and addressed to facilitate learning.

In addition, results from this survey point to ways in which librarians can create a better assessment instrument to take into account students' varying language skills. Some of the students expressed themselves awkwardly so that it was difficult to understand what they actually learned. For instance, some students mentioned they learned about the library database, which is a vague and confusing response. Do they mean OSCAR? Do they think of the library web site as a database? Or are they referring to Academic Search Premier? While for some students difficulty with language may be a result of limited English proficiency, for others confusing language may be an indication that they did not really learn what they think they learned, which brings into question whether they will be able to apply the lessons from the session. As well, the worlds of information and technology have their own vocabulary which can be confusing to beginning learners. For example, students can refer to OSCAR as a catalog, an online catalog, a search engine, a system, a program, a file or the library database. Does the way they refer to it indicate their level of understanding of it? Further research is needed to determine whether the way in which students describe their learning, specifically which words they use, is indicative of their level of understanding.

An additional drawback to this type of survey is that we discovered what students learned as a result of the session, but we have no way of knowing what knowledge they came in with. In the future, it might be worthwhile to conduct a pre-test to assess what students already know. As well, a pre- and post-test

instruments would be stronger methods of measuring learning outcomes.

Unfortunately, we have no way to gauge whether they actually learned what they said they learned and if they were able to apply what they learned in their class assignments. The greatest limitation of the Minute Survey is that it is a self-report instrument and hence vulnerable to the biases inherent in any self-report measure. Students may have been eager to make a good impression and to tell us what we wanted to hear. As well, students may feel they learned something but be unable to apply it in new contexts.

It would be invaluable to work with faculty to measure the impact of information literacy sessions on student learning. We would expect students who had received information literacy instruction to be able to cite more scholarly and authoritative sources, more varied materials (books, journal articles, newspaper articles) and to cite more sources than students who had never attended an information literacy session and to better understand search strategies and be able to explain them to their peers.

Results of the Minute Survey point to possible future projects for the library. One initiative already planned is the revision of the survey instrument. A newer instrument will ask students to rate aspects of library instruction using a 5-point Likert scale and should be less time-consuming to score. We are also exploring the possibility of an online instrument.

### **Conclusion**

Student responses to Minute Surveys clearly show that students feel they learned about a wide variety of resources, which means that information literacy sessions are a successful adjunct to student learning at New Jersey City University. In particular, student praise for the librarians and presentations points to the necessity of providing instruction in research and resources in a formal classroom environment. Students repeated many times their appreciation for the opportunity to see how to conduct research in a “step-by-step” fashion. Many of our students have never before received instruction in library research methods and resources and would probably not have learned about these resources on their own.

For more information about this survey, please contact:

Grace Bulaong, Library Director  
Congressman Frank J. Guarini Library  
New Jersey City University  
2039 Kennedy Blvd.  
Jersey City, NJ 07305  
Telephone: 201-200-2036  
Fax: 201-200-2330  
[gbulaong@njcu.edu](mailto:gbulaong@njcu.edu)