UW Libraries and the Greater Western Library Alliance: 
Student Learning Impact Study

Background

UW Libraries provides library research workshops to first-year students through the Expository Writing Program and the First Year Interest Group courses. These sessions are taught by librarians and graduate students. Workshops are designed around two-three student learning outcomes. Session themes include:

- Generating research topics and keywords
- Research question development
- Finding relevant sources
- Evaluating sources
- Citation management tools.

For the pilot phase of the project, we gathered data from each library instruction session provided to the Expository Writing program for the academic year 2014-2015, including the types of instruction the students received. We tracked active learning techniques, flipped classroom design, and research assignment design to further explore the impact of specific types of library instruction. To determine the impact of these sessions on student success, we accessed anonymized student data through the UW Enterprise Data Warehouse (EDW), and cross-referenced retention and GPA data for students who had a library instruction session versus those who did not.

Methodology

Over the past 10 years, there has been an increased focus on assessment and effort to define the role of the academic library in the success of an institution. The Greater Western Library Alliance has formed a research body of 20 institutions to investigate the following questions related to the impact of libraries on student achievement. The three-year project is in its pilot phase, with all institutions gathering data and creating norms for comparison. As part of a local pilot project, UW has gathered data from fall quarter 2013 and the academic year 2014-2015 to compare students’ academic performance and retention. This project investigates the following research questions:

1. What effect does library instruction have on the retention of first-year college students?
2. What is the impact of specific library instruction methods on the retention of first-year college students?
3. What effect does library instruction have on the academic success of first-year college students?
4. What is the impact of specific library instruction methods on the academic success of first-year college students?

Findings

Student achievement and retention are complex concepts that are not easily evaluated in terms of narrow, specific interventions. Based on our analysis of the literature and the data we’ve collected this year, we recommend the following steps for further assessing the UW Libraries Teaching and Learning Program:

- Shifting focus from retention to assessing students’ academic achievement, which is more clearly mapped to library interventions. Considering academic achievement as it pertains to specific courses will also uncover opportunities for growth and focus instruction efforts where they have the most potential for impact.
- This data represents only one component of undergraduate students’ academic success, thus further qualitative investigation (via focus groups, satisfaction surveys, or a library impact map) is needed.
- A more granular look at specific types of library instruction (consultation, online course integration, and library workshop) will uncover effective intervention methods and inform best practices.

Recommendations and Next Steps

Special thanks to:
Amanda Hornby, Teaching and Learning Program Librarian, UW Libraries
Jackie Belanger, Reference & Instruction Librarian, UW Libraries
Dev Nambo, Data Scientist, UW Enterprise Data Warehouse
And all of the librarians and graduate assistants who provide instruction for the UW Expository Writing Program.