“Citation Skills and Scholarly Resource Awareness of Freshmen”
Devin Savage and Charlotte Cubbage, Northwestern University Library

In 2013, the University Library’s Learning Services Unit in the User Experience Department began an assessment of Northwestern freshmen Information Literacy skills and awareness of resources. The Learning Services Unit, in consultation with the Assessment Librarian, devised a questionnaire to be given out at the beginning of library instruction sessions for freshmen seminars. Fourteen classes from three schools were surveyed in the winter quarter. 206 responses were gathered.

Motivations and Assumptions:
Most freshmen do not receive library instruction
Most library instructors do not make citation recognition a focus
There is no cross-cutting assessment for our library instruction

Question 1: Citation Identification
Please fill in the blanks using the following terms: Author, Editor, Journal Name, Article, Chapter Title, Title of article, Book, Chapter, Publication Date, Chapter Author, Title of book, Publisher


Question 1 Results
Out of 206 valid responses, only 75 were completely correct, even with the provision of all of the correct answers. 86 students had three or more errors, and we noted that the Book Chapter citation was particularly difficult for the students to identify. Approximately 50% clearly had no idea what a book chapter citation was.

Question 2: You have been asked to research Lake Michigan water levels over the past 20 years using scholarly resources to support your data. Which of the following do you think qualify as scholarly resources? Circle all that apply.

Question 2 Results
Out of 180 answers, 165 got “D” correct, and only 25 marked “C” (incorrect) which was impressive. However, this was a “circle all that apply” which demonstrates a high error rate on A (46.7%)

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Question 3: If you were asked to research teenagers and multiple personality disorder where would you begin your research (circle your choice)?
A. Google
B. Psychology (a database available to you as part of the Northwestern community)
C. JSTOR (a database available to you as part of the Northwestern community)
D. Wikipedia

Overall Findings
- The majority of NU freshmen cannot interpret the components of a scholarly citation
- Close to 50% of NU freshmen exhibit confusion over what constitutes a scholarly resource
- The majority of NU freshmen do not think of the library/librarians as research resources
- 42% of NU freshmen have little knowledge of academic online resources
- Freshmen can reliably identify a scholarly resource, but have difficulty identifying what is not a scholarly resource.

Where are the first two places you would go for assistance in answering any of these questions?

Our Next Steps
- Outreach to faculty via an infographic and through library liaisons
- A set of 3 short, accessible video tutorials on citations, 2 of which are available already on the library website
- Outreach to Library Instructors via presentations of the data and training sessions
- An immediate follow-up project 1, using this data to inform and improve our efforts at both wider and deeper inquiry into this topic