Geomorphology: Changing the scholarly sources landscape with geology students

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Geomorphology: Changing the scholarly sources landscape with geology students

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Abstract

The STEM Librarian and faculty member teamed up to stage a library instruction intervention when the term paper sources students turned in at the beginning of the semester were wilted Wikipedia articles and limp corporate websites. Students were asked to write a term paper explaining the geomorphic processes that shaped a landscape of their choice using scientific literature. A mix of third and fourth years, students needed to spruce up critical thinking and evaluation skills. Students needed assistance knowing what type of information they were looking for and finding discipline-specific information and evaluating sources. Armed with ACRL Information Literacy Standards for Science, a shiny new LibGuide, and a hands-on classroom activity called “Scholarly or Not,” the librarian taught students how to identify and prune away the popular sources and identify appropriate sources.

Instruction

The class participated in an activity called “Scholarly or Not”, which required students as a class to evaluate a source for appropriateness and building on their knowledge of the characteristics of what a “good” source might look like for this particular assignment. After each slide, there was discussion on when and where this source might be appropriate for information. Sources varied from tabloids to encyclopedias and self-published books. Screenshots of peer-reviewed items from the GeoRef Database were also included so students would know how to look for indicators of online scholarly sources.

Student Learning Outcomes

• Student can name the parts of a scholarly source.
• Student can identify scholarly sources through critical thinking.
• Student can evaluate an information source for appropriateness to the assignment.

Assessment Components

• In-class: The instructor and professor gaged whether students understood the differences through verbal feedback in the discussion.
• After class: A rubric was used to assess student assignments.

Activity

First Draft

• 2-4 pages of text with the goal of getting words/ideas onto paper in an outlined form
• Description of the location, a description of the geologic history of the site and the main geomorphic features
• 10 scholarly sources

Examples of student citations:

Goal: 80%

Second Draft

• 4-6 pages of text where students construct their stories
• Describe the geomorphic processes that created the landscape features and use solid supporting evidence from sources
• 15 scholarly sources cited correctly

Examples of student citations:

Final Draft

• Paper eloquently communicates an interesting story
• At least 15 scholarly sources cited correctly
• Included figures or photographs that supported the ideas presented in the paper

Examples of student citations:

Results

The librarian and professor independently assessed each student paper using the rubric. After each individual assessment, scores were averaged together to create the final scores in the Expert, Advanced, and Novice categories. Expert papers included at least 80% of the expected outcomes, advanced papers included 50-80% of the expected outcomes, and novice papers contained less than 50% of the expected outcomes. In each draft, the goal was to have 80% of students fall into the Expert or Advanced categories.

A second rubric was created to assess the sources students were using at the four different stages of writing, including the topic paper, the first draft, the second draft, and the final draft.

Conclusion and Future Directions

What worked:
• Identifying scholarly sources with specific examples in class
• Demonstrating how to access the library’s resources
• Inviting “outside expert” to emphasize instructor’s learning outcomes helped solidify the reasons for using library resources
• Feedback on multiple drafts through out the semester

What needs work:
• More face time with librarian: office hours, consultations
• Clarifying assignment instructions for students
• Additional planning between librarian and instructor early on

Select References

University of Nebraska at Omaha, “University of Nebraska at Omaha STEM Strategic Plan,” 2013, http://www.unomaha.edu/aces/STEM_Strategic_Plan.pdf (accessed November 26, 2014).


