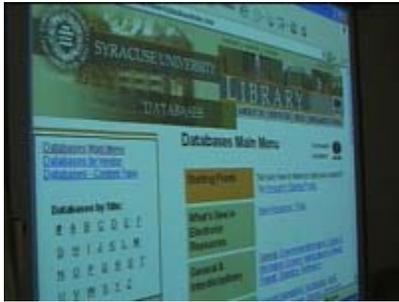


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LIBRARIAN CHALLENGE: Reaching College Freshmen

by MariRae Dopke-Wilson



Your college or university library likely subscribes to dozens, maybe even hundreds of informational databases to facilitate the most comprehensive student research. Yet at the same time, many undergraduate students are Googling their way through project research assignments unaware of these rich resources. Getting acclimated to campus life is overwhelming to most freshmen, making library orientation low on their priority list. When you have a captive freshman audience for information

literacy/library instruction, how do you hold their attention? We teamed up with two college librarians in action. Michael Pasqualoni, Instructional Services Librarian at Syracuse University Library, taught IST 200 last Fall. He relied on an arsenal of media tools to keep students interested and responsive. Just a few blocks away at the adjacent State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) campus, Assistant Librarian Linda Galloway meets a similar challenge. In addition to teaching an Information Literacy course, she instructs a one-class information session for freshmen, aptly named, "25 Tips in 50 Minutes."

Use Multimedia

Michael Pasqualoni [see photo right] advocates using multiple components in his lessons that have a beginning, middle and ending to keep sessions upbeat and interactive.

"I like to use a lot of media including outside media, audio and video that's available on-line on the web. This is in keeping with a philosophy. The role of the 'sage on the stage' as an instructor has almost passed away. I'm there to be a facilitator. I share the wisdom I have for this subject with the students, but I rely on outside media as well. I bring in other elements that will reinforce the theme and things produced by other people, not just myself."

At ESF, Galloway's 'Tips' class focuses on using Moon Library's resources.

"At SU and the College of Forestry, our students have access to some 365 different databases, which is an overwhelming number for anybody. I've picked out in my lesson about 10 different databases, I've written up on a little sheet how to find these databases and to suggest to the students where to go if they need a peer review journal article, which is a question that we are frequently asked here in the library. So I describe to them what a peer review journal article is, and how to find it. In the lesson I'll be searching in some of our databases, and I try to tailor the search to the class; for example, if I'm speaking to wildlife class I'll do searches on some kind of wildlife biology."

Linda [see photo right] is a stickler on preparedness and having back-ups when using technology, especially in a one-class session. She feels it's very important to be comfortable enough to think on your feet to be able to do something else if what you have planned isn't working. Galloway stresses it's imperative to always anticipate that not everything is going to work as planned!



"I can do a search on a topic today and when I get in front of a class, it may not work the same way. One thing I'd like to tell people who plan on teaching information literacy or one-shot guest lectures is to make sure you have your data or your information in more than one place. I always e-mail the information to myself and carry it on a memory stick, but I've been in places where the keyboard didn't work right, so I wasn't able to log-in to my e-mail to retrieve the PowerPoint that I had e-mailed to myself. A second time there was no port for my memory stick, a third time the projector didn't work, so I think it's important to be really over prepared. Make sure you have your information in many different formats and that you can talk without anything, if you need to."

Make It Relevant

Michael Pasqualoni believes the key to motivational teaching is making sessions relevant to the needs and interests of the students. He poses the question to freshmen, what do you want to get out of this course, what can we cover that is meaningful? He takes this philosophy a step further by making his classes interactive, reciprocal experiences.

"What I think is interesting to discover about college freshmen, despite maybe a stereo type about cockiness or assertiveness, is actually there's a great deal of shyness in the instructional setting. And one of the pieces of advice that I would convey to instructors is just be willing to experiment, to break through the barrier of shyness. Be prepared for the situation where you ask a question in the classroom and nobody raises their hands and five minutes go by and nobody's going to talk - no one is going to come out of their shell. One of the things I try to accomplish is breaking through that through the use of a variety of techniques. You chop it into little pieces. In certain pieces you are using media, in others, you the instructor are speaking to the students, and in others the students are doing something interactive."

In IST 200, Michael finds students not wanting to use on-line tutorials while sporting the attitude, 'we know how to search the web.' Interestingly enough, he says when asked to sit down in class to keyboard and perform a search themselves, many exhibit uncertainty about where they should go after their keywords are entered. By experimenting in class, he learns that students actually do need assistance in their searches.



During the class, Pasqualoni also introduces an interactive exercise to students called "Radical Syllabus." He learned about the concept from an article in the Journal of Library Administration that suggests giving some instructor control back to students to increase their level of interest. He

launches the exercise by asking students to peruse topics on several dozen page-like posters throughout the classroom. From these they will choose five topics of interest to be used as subject matter during the next five classes. Each student prioritizes their choices on a written ballot form Pasqualoni has made. He also has given them a section on the ballot where they may list and describe their own write-in topic. Each ballot is finally deposited in a ballot box [see photo above left] before students leave class for their break.

"I think the principal of giving some of the control to the students, and more important, listening to where they need help, listening to what they'd like to learn is really important. When all these students come back from their break, we are going to look at what they voted on in today's session. We're going to come to consensus that these are topics that we all share as important, and that's going to be a graduate school sort of seminar, but the most important thing is that they take the lead in the discussion. Now, I will be there as a facilitator because I still think it's important to realize these are SU freshmen. They are looking for the guidance of the instructor. The radical syllabus approach and the article that explains it warns about giving up too much of the control. You need to facilitate the experience, you still need to have the outcomes clearly defined, but it has a lot to do with listening to how you guide the students through to those learning outcomes."

ESF's Galloway believes that when speaking with freshmen, it is important to be approachable and inviting.

"They are usually sort of overwhelmed by everything else that they are trying to do right now. I also try to make the sessions fairly short knowing that they may not be interested in the library right now, but they will need to use our services at some point in their career. I'm trying to get the students comfortable using the library and to realize that the library is a welcoming place for them."

Plan Special Events

Special library events are a wonderful way to get the attention of freshman. SU's Library Lock-in (a collaboration with the Office of Residence Life) is a popular annual happening where music, food, fun and competition combine as students stay up half the night in Bird Library. Students come prepared to party and work diligently, in three forty-minute rounds testing their research skills. Pasqualoni loves the event saying it works against the stereotype that research is a dreary process.



"When you actually meet serious scholars who get into research and love what they do, it's anything but dreary. In our own small way, it's combining a party with an SAT exam and we look at it that way."



The event requires long-range planning by library and campus Residence Life staff. Residence Life personnel arranged all event promotion, registration, party food, music, raffles and prizes for the Lock-In. Library staff handled competition questions, rules and monitoring.

"We made a few changes this year based on student feedback. We reduced the difficulty level of the questions a bit. We've mixed up questions that require on-line research along with more traditional book library resources and other formats."

Pasqualoni says there are multiple goals that pay off from the Library Lock-In event.

"Freshmen at a university have so many things to get to know that it's so easy for the library to become a foreign place. They may not have time when they get here to learn their way around a large facility like this so we're contributing to that learning process. I think we're also letting them know that the staff at the library are friendly, approachable folks that can help them with their research, and they can have relationships with us throughout their years here at the campus."

Freshman Teaching Tips

Here are a few excellent tips garnered from Pasqualoni and Galloway:

- Chunk lessons into a beginning, middle and ending
- Use mixed media and approaches to keep interest (e.g., instructor lecture, video clips & student interaction)
- Experiment and try new techniques (e.g., "Radical Syllabus" exercise)
- Ask students "what interests you?"
- Distribute helpful handouts
- Be "Presentation-Proofed" by carrying material in several formats
- Plan a "Library Lock-In" event and create excitement

Special thanks to librarians Michael Pasqualoni and Linda Galloway for allowing us to visit them on campus. You can link to the S.O.S. for Information Literacy database and view or download to your desktop a feature on [Syracuse University's Library Lock-In](#).

About the Author



MariRae Dopke-Wilson is a veteran media producer. She is the feature story writer for the *Educators' Spotlight Digest* and producer of many video clips for the *S.O.S. for Information Literacy* project. In the past several years, she has interviewed dozens of library media specialists and captured their stories in both print and video.