Conectando Hispanic College Students
with
Information Literacy

Proposal:
With the demographics of the population in the United States changing from a dominant Caucasian one to one with approximately one-third ethnic groups, the population of non-white students attending colleges and universities has increased (Bruner, 1999). Specifically, the number of Hispanic enrolled in college has increased to a record number of 1.2 million students in 1997 (Scott, 1997). Many of these Hispanic students will be first generation college attendees, who will not be familiar with the vast array of electronic information choices, and therefore may not know how to evaluate the informational content of these resources needed for successful learning.

Theoretically-focused articles state that the academic library can help to increase student retention by providing bibliographic instruction, conducting instructive reference interviews that assist students’ academic achievement and the focus of this paper teaching information literacy skills (Jones-Quartey, 1993; Kelley, 1995). The American Library Association (ALA) describes information literacy as “being able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information” (1989). Going a step further, Nancy Dewald and others describe information literacy as being a fundamental component of the educational process, whereby students learn how to think actively and critically about information rather than to passively receive prepackaged facts or materials (Dewald et al, 2000).

In the United States, higher education institutions have made considerable investments to make electronic resources available and accessible to their students. For example, Penn State University has a collection of over 350 databases available for their entire academic community to use. In addition, these students have access to free Web search engines such as Google, which claim to have access to over 3 billion web pages. These new opportunities to access information allow students to do their research from home, dormitories and any other wired place, meaning an intermediary does not have to be physically present. However, just making information available and accessible is not sufficient in itself; students also need information-handling skills in order to be able to use it.

Anecdotally, it is not uncommon to hear undergraduate instructors state that when questioning students about knowing how to use the library to do research, these students invariably reply they know to use the library. Contrary to this, in a study by Gloria Leckie, it was shown that students do indeed face problems using the library and that many faculty do not know this (Leckie, 1998). Leckie provides evidence that suggests that undergraduates have only a vague awareness of how scholarly sources are produced. These students also seem not to know the purpose of scholarly information. In addition, students also had great difficulty in judging the differences between types of information sources. This study and others suggest that some undergraduate students are information illiterate. Taking this into consideration, this presentation plans to make the case that the responsibility for teaching information literacy be shared throughout an academic institution, rather than limited to the library. An outline of the complementary responsibilities of librarians and classroom faculty in teaching information literacy will be presented.
References:


