Creating an Information Curriculum and Assessment for First-Year Students:
A Case Study

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Abstract: In Fall 2001, Arizona State University West admitted its inaugural first-year class. Previously, ASU West offered upper division and graduate level academic programs. A learning community model was adopted in which faculty, librarians, and technology specialists were partnered to develop learning opportunities for students. All students participated in a common, basic information and technology curriculum that included identifying, locating and evaluating information resources, email and course software. In addition, a web-based information and technology skills assessment was developed to administer to students as they entered and exited the first year. Five attributes of information competency were assessed using a performance-based measure while six attributes of technology skills were measured through a self-assessment. This poster will illustrate the curriculum implemented with first-year students during the 2001-02 academic year along with assessment results.

In fall 2001, Arizona State University West admitted its inaugural first-year class. Previously, ASU West offered only upper-division and selected masters’ degree programs. Concurrently, ASU West was wrestling with campus-wide assessment expectations from its accrediting body, North Central Association. These expectations made demonstrating progress toward developing student outcomes assessment a campus priority. Campus-wide Categories of Learning Outcomes, including information and technology competencies, were created to assist with this mandate. As a ready made cohort, whose orientation and management would be more controlled than the traditional transfer students, the first-year students became a focus for meeting the campus-wide assessment mandate.

The Learning Community model was adopted as a pilot for working with first-year students. Learning Communities consisted of teams of faculty, a librarian and a technology specialist with two thematically linked courses plus a one credit Academic Success class. Librarians actively participated in the planning of this new model providing ample opportunity to lobby for and obtain permission to deliver a common library curriculum to first year-students and to implement its own assessment program for Information Competencies.

Librarians created a menu of learning outcomes for first-year students, a “curriculum plan” for delivering instruction in the fall Learning Communities, and the Spring 2002 ENG 102 classes, and a plan for pre and post testing of students’ Information Competencies.

A team of Librarians interested in assessment created a web-based performance measure with assistance from an Information Technology consultant on campus. The Information and Technology Skills Assessment (ITSA) assessed five attributes from the Library’s defined Information Competencies in a performance based format. The ITSA measured seven technology attributes through a self reporting measure. Both parts of the assessment were delivered in the same Web-based instrument. Previous pilots of assessment efforts had established that a self-reporting of technology skills was valid, while the information skills required a performance based format.

The information attributes measured were 1) Recognizing catalog and database structure and records, 2) Identifying citations and attributing authorship, 3) Evaluating information sources, 4) Recognizing and applying search techniques, and 5) Recognizing effective research plans and search strategies. The technology attributes measured...
were using: 1) a computer system, 2) word processing, 3) electronic communications, 4) the Internet, 5) a spreadsheet, 6) presentation software, and 7) database software.

Incoming first year students took the online ITSA assessment within the first few weeks of their first semester and shortly before the end of the second semester at ASU West. The pre and post assessment results were compared for the information portion. The results for the technology section were not completed by the deadline of this abstract but will be reported during the conference.

Sixty-three first-year students participated in both the pre assessment and the post assessment. Paired-samples t-tests were conducted on the pre and post assessment for the information competency. The results indicate that the mean percent of information competency questions correct on the post-assessment was significantly greater than the mean percent of information competency questions correct on the pre-assessment, overall, and for four of the five attributes. For the citation and attribution dimension, the results for first-year students indicated that the mean percent of information competency questions correct on the post-assessment was not significantly greater than the mean percent of information competency questions correct on the pre-assessment.