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Return on Instruction: Methods for Assessing the Impact of Information Literacy Instruction on the Use of Electronic Resources

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Introduction

Studies show that teens and young adults are less likely to turn to library databases than to other sources when conducting research. For example, Zickuhr (2013) drew on data from multiple Pew Research studies on how teens conduct research to show that teens are more likely to turn to Google (94%), Wikipedia (75%), YouTube (52%), and even their peers (43%) at much higher rates than they do to electronic databases like those published by EBSCO or JSTOR (17%). A Project Information Literacy study, led by Head & Eisenberg (2009), demonstrated that college students frequently continue to turn to the open web or other resources, such as their course readings, before they seek new information using library databases or resources.

Yet, the successful transition from secondary-school-level research to college-level research necessitates the use of specialized databases and other information sources. Instruction librarians strive to raise awareness of library databases through in-person classes and specialized research guides, but to what end? Does providing in-person library instruction paired with an online resource guide translate to increased likelihood of turning to library resources over previous habits?

Most studies that examine this question look at how college students are conducting research by surveying and interviewing students about their behaviors and thus rely on self-reported data. Santa Clara University librarians wanted to explore a method to collect behavioral evidence so they could look at what students actually do, rather than what they say they do. By examining "asset clicks" -- hits on databases via online guides -- librarians examined how librarians might use this data to explore the relationship between instruction and database use.

Key Research Question

How can we begin to study what instruction and usage data tell us about the relationship between in-person library instruction and the likelihood that students will turn to library resources rather than revert to fallback sources such as the open web?

Sample & Methods

Quantitative data was collected through the LibGuides statistics module for seven courses that received both in-person library instruction and a course-specific LibGuide during the spring 2015 quarter (March 30-June 12, 2015). A total of 241 students participated in library instruction in the sample classes (out of a total undergraduate enrollment of 5,336 FTE). The sample classes included a range of upper and lower division courses. Library instruction included a variety of instructional techniques, including active learning, brief presentations, and small group instruction.

The number of asset clicks from each guide were collected and analyzed. Assets in LibGuides are linked resources (databases,

websites, etc.) selected by librarians and linked on the guides. The LibGuides statistics module provides data at the guide-level about these assets. Assets are primarily databases on SCU course guides, so this measure was used as a proxy for database access. Librarians also collected and analyzed the number of guide home page visits. Home page visits were used as a proxy for the number of visits to the guide because students will nearly always access the guide via the home page. LibGuides statistics combined with data collected about the instruction session through an instruction tracking form were used to look for trends in resource use.

Observations & Limitations

With this small sample, librarians identified that it is feasible to look at student access of databases and other library resources in relation to other elements such as integration of assignments, type of instruction provided, length of instruction session, and intensity of instruction. We were not surprised to see that asset clicks were highest in all cases on instruction days, and then clustered around assignment due dates in many of the classes we reviewed. We were surprised that multiple instruction sessions did not appear to increase sustained access to assets from the guides.

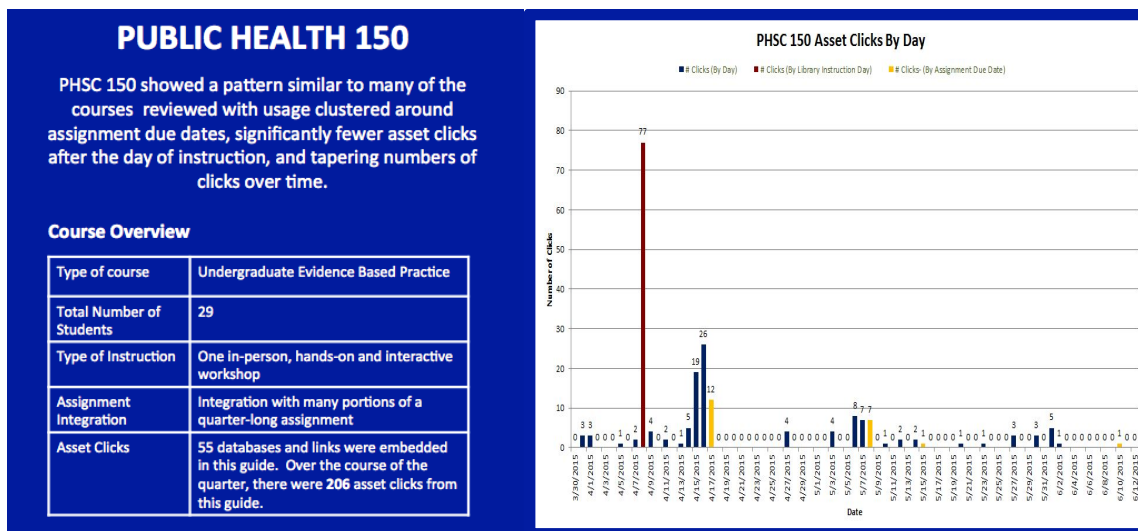
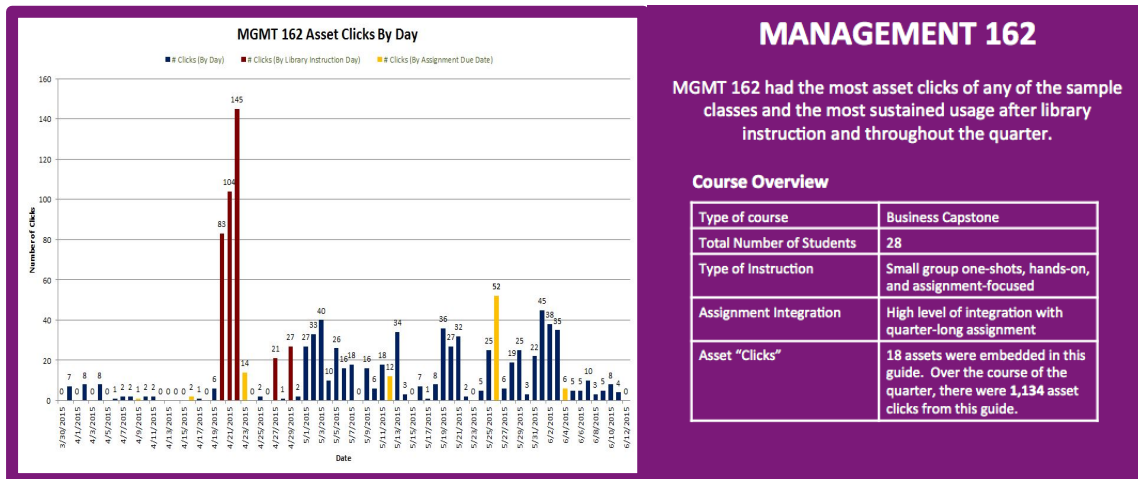
This study is limited as an exploration of methodology. Because this was an initial exploration, we did not integrate other usage data to try to determine where students were accessing resources outside of the guide. Also, the sample size was intentionally small in order to determine the feasibility of the methodology, and our results are not conclusive or definitive. In testing this method, we also identified a few limitations to scaling this method. First, while we were able to view the data we needed in the LibGuides statistics module, the download options were limited, requiring manual data entry. Also, inconsistencies with how our database assets were created in LibGuides prevented us from getting database-specific metrics in some cases.

The Management courses represented the kind of sustained usage activity that could be an indicator of successful instruction. Systematically examining a larger sample could demonstrate correlations between instruction elements and sustained usage activity to inform our teaching practices.

Initial Conclusions & Next Steps

This method has potential to help librarians explore how teaching techniques, assignment integration, time provided for instruction, and multi-sessions impact use of resources. The method could be used in conjunction with other usage data to tell us more about what our students are (or are not) using and how they are getting to our resources. The next sample should include a larger number of courses, allowing for better analysis by discipline or course level. Other student products (such as bibliographies) could be analyzed to explore where students are ultimately turning for sources, as well as the overall quality of sources used.

Sample Data from Management 162 & Public Health 150



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