Humanities EN 104 sessions conducted for Professor Nancy McMichael (Loretta/Spring 2017)

The following 5 short sessions were conducted in close collaboration with professor McMichael and were timed to correlate with the instruction she was presenting at the time. Frequently she would provide an introduction and worksheets to test what we covered to assess their understanding of the lesson and their ability to apply what they learned.

First session

Frame: Information Creation as a Process

Outcome: Identify different types of information and the changing nature and value as it evolves; begin to determine the purpose each level will serve in the research process.

Topic: Primary vs. secondary sources; popular vs. scholarly sources
Discussion questions –
- What is a primary source?
- Why use primary sources?
- How can I tell if something is a primary source?
- Where can I find primary sources?

Library resources, internet sources, suggested places to look and ways to search presented.

The same format was followed for secondary sources

Next we discussed and identified the characteristics of sample popular and scholarly collection resources. To assess their learning they were asked to individually list 3 characteristics of a scholarly source and 3 of a popular source, and to name 3 primary source items in the collection. (Note: in future classes would recommend using online resources)

Bonus questions: Where do you find information on whether a journal is peer-reviewed? Can a scholarly journal contain content that is not scholarly? If so, what? Can either contain credible information?

Second session

Frame: Searching as strategic exploration

Outcome: utilize search strategies to focus their search topics

Short video: Research 101: Searching is strategic exploration &/or tutorial from Primo: Analyze Your Research Strategy, includes a very short YouTube video entitled “UCD Faces of Research – what is research?”

Topic: Introduction to Boolean/search logic – used the earth / wind / fire tutorial on the web.

Worksheet designed for this session included a Venn diagram and had them list their search topic, relevant terms, choose a database (either ASP or LexisNexis was suggested), run three simple searches using each of the connectors (AND, OR, NOT), explain results.
A separate worksheet was designed asking students to identify key search terms related to their proposed topic; brainstorm related search terms; combine and search them in various ways to recognize best results.

Third session

Frame: Information has value

Outcome: Evaluate sources for credibility, relevance and value; understand how the information presented to readers is affected by the perceptions of the writers, demands of the source, online interaction, etc.

Topic: Evaluation of sources:
Discussion questions: divide students into groups and ask them to spend the next 5-10 minutes discussing the following statements/questions:
- Describe a “reliable” source or “credible” source.
- Describe a “relevant” source.
- What are we talking about when we say a source is “biased”?
- What is “angle of vision”?
- In what way do these concepts differ?

Regroup & share

Short video excerpts: TED talk by Lara Setrakian, creator of News Deeply / Syria Deeply
Three ways to fix a broken news industry: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1R4F9s_oow
Share your thoughts.

Next work through the Evaluation of Sources worksheet. Find 1 or 2 websites related to our subject. List (on worksheet) date of source, title, author – including credentials, experience, other works; bias; reflect and share what makes you think the site is or isn’t credible; is it relevant?
Discussion time.
Questions

Fourth session

Frame: Information creation as a process

Outcome: Identify the ways information changes along the course of the natural information cycle in order to select appropriate sources

Topic: The information cycle
Discussion: Students are divided into groups of 2 or 3. Each group is given 2 sources of information related to a prominent news event in the past, along with a post-it note. Sources are internet postings, blogs, database records, web sites, journal articles, and books. The items range in time from first notice on the web, to news reports in the first days after the event, a week later, a month later, several months later, a year later, several years later. Students are asked to note and discuss content, credibility, authority of the source, volume of information, etc., and to choose one person in their group to present a summary discussion at the end of the class. There are 4 posters on the wall labeled first days to one week after the event / 2 weeks to
6 months after the event / 7 months to one year after the event / and several years after the event. Students are asked to note the title of the item, date of item, and source on the post-it note and to post them on the appropriate posters around the room. Discussion follows.

Fifth session

Frame: Information has value; authority is constructed and contextual

Outcome: students make informed choices of online resources aware that their search results may be affected by their previous online activity; students effectively recognize and use indicators of authority to determine credibility of sources.

Topic: Evaluation of online sources
Discussion: Instructor requested pointers on evaluating websites for credibility – i.e., review the characteristics of one good and one not-so-good site with them and then have them do some evaluating on their own. Students had done some evaluation of websites in the previous class where they were asked to do some evaluation but some were unable to identify what led them to believe their source was credible. The instructor gave students a detailed description of 18 questions divided into 4 categories that they should be able to answer when evaluating the credibility of a website. They were asked to write an evaluation essay on two web sites related to their research topic, for points.
I ran a simple search on Google looking for information on genetically modified organisms; chose two sites, and asked them to review with me the author/format/audience/content/timeliness/purpose information on each. We ended with remarks on why each site did/did not pass as a credible source.
Students spent the remainder of the class working on their assignment.