Background

UW's new general ed requirements include a 3-part communication (COM) sequence.
- focused on academic & professional communication
- written, oral, & digital elements
- key learning outcomes: find, evaluate, analyze & use information

We wanted to know if library instruction was related to higher performance on these information literacy tasks.

Our library had already worked with the English department to assess first-year writing classes; for this project we looked at their multi-section COM 2 and 3 classes, Introduction to Literature and Writing in the Professions.

Key background reading:
- assessing information literacy with rubrics: Jastram, Leebaw & Tompkins 2014
- assessing tiered library instruction: Bowles-Terry 2012
- student evaluation and use of information: Project Information Literacy, Head 2007, Head & Eisenberg 2010

Methods

Librarians worked with the COM coordinator and an instructional designer to develop a rubric for scoring student work. It borrows from the Claremont Colleges and Lane Community College rubrics: http://bit.ly/1ruW3oL

Librarians and English grad students joined the campus team to score assignments.

Findings

We analyzed 158 student assignments, collected from 4 sections of Introduction to Literature and 5 sections of Writing in the Professions.

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Writing in the Professions (seniors)

Student performance in Writing in the Professions was better explained by their particular assignment requirements than whether they received library instruction. Students in face-to-face sections overall outperformed those in online sections.

Introduction to Literature (sophomores & juniors)

Students who received library instruction performed better on all measures.

What's Next

Revising our rubric after talking with instructors about how they judge whether students meet the learning outcomes.

Working with course coordinators for the literature and professional writing classes to develop shared syllabi.

Tailoring COM 3 instruction to address finding appropriate methods for research proposal assignments.

A follow-up qualitative study looking at information-seeking behavior among COM 3 students (including those in COM 3 courses not taught by the English department).

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