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## Information Literacy in Writing Tutor Training at a Liberal Arts College

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# INFORMATION LITERACY AND WRITING TUTOR TRAINING AT A LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

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## ABSTRACT

Academic librarians have long understood and argued for the importance of integrating information literacy into the curriculum. The literature shows strong evidence of librarians collaborating with faculty, peer tutors, and other on-campus constituencies in an effort to facilitate both the discussion and acquisition of information literacy skills and concepts. The literature points to a likely collaboration: that of libraries and writing centers, in light of their corresponding missions and endeavors. This paper details how two academic librarians partnered with teaching faculty who oversee the campus writing center to infuse information literacy skills and concepts into the training of writing tutors. The authors explore the history of the collaboration with faculty that led up to the information literacy workshops, provide a detailed explanation of workshop activities, focusing on disciplinary discourse and resource evaluation, and discuss how information literacy standards were embedded in the activities. We also consider challenges and opportunities afforded by the experience, as well as future steps to extend this collaboration.

## INTRODUCTION

The literature consistently demonstrates that the reach of information literacy can be extended by librarians collaborating with faculty and peer tutors. Reports of successful librarian–faculty collaborations abound, spanning from

networking to coordination to fully integrative experiences (Black, Crest, & Volland, 2001; Gallegos & Wright, 2000; Iannuzzi, 1998; Rader, 1999; Walter, Ariew, Beasley, Tillman, & Ver Steeg, 2000). Successful ventures have included such features as course-integrated instruction, collaborating through instructional

technology, assignment and course design, and outreach projects. Such collaboration is championed as the key to truly successful information literacy initiatives (Black, Crest, & Volland, 2001; Mackey & Jacobson, 2005; Rader, 1999; Raspa & Ward, 2000): "Building relationships with faculty is the critical component in creating an environment that fosters collaboration between teaching faculty and librarians for information literacy instruction." (Black, Crest, & Volland, 2001, p. 216).

Others have found that student peer tutors are the key to successful outreach to the larger student body. Utah State University librarians, for example, implemented a Library Peer Mentor program, training student assistants to work with librarians at both the reference desk and in the classroom. Initial successes prompted staff to extend the program into freshmen orientation and more library instruction (Holliday & Nordgren, 2005). The University of New Mexico also hired students as "library strategies tutors" to work individually with students and as assistants in the library instruction classroom (Deese-Roberts & Keating, 2000). Librarians at Trinity University used peer tutors on campus as library advocates to market library services and resources, effectively making use of the tutors' authority and reach, especially to first-year students (Millet & Chamberlain, 2007). Librarians at the University of Maine at Farmington used student workers' input to assist in designing, implementing, and marketing their fledgling information literacy program (Furlong & Crawford, 1999).

One office that invites student collaboration with faculty and peer tutors on many campuses is the writing center. In fact, student workers in the Furlong and Crawford (1999) study specifically named the writing center as a likely ally in promoting library services. Theorists in the study of information literacy continue to uncover areas of overlap between information literacy and rhetoric and composition (Jacobs, 2008; Norgaard, 2003). Libraries and writing centers make likely collaborators because, as

Elmborg (2005) suggests, both are oriented toward dealing with real-world problems; both regularly mediate between faculty and students, interpreting assignments and their requirements; and, most notably, both believe in the importance of process in addition to, or sometimes over, product. In fact, Elmborg says, "the writing process and the research process are so intimately intertwined in the academic work of students that any effort to separate the two compromises the effort to create an accurate model for working with students" (p. 9). With library expertise in the research process and writing center expertise in the writing process, possibilities for collaboration are numerous.

One concrete instance of collaboration between writing center and library is that occurring at the University of Rochester, where librarians are themselves writing tutors and help in training new writing instructors. This collaboration resulted in an increased awareness that both parties benefit considerably from the other's expertise: Writing tutors benefit from librarians' research expertise while librarians benefit by learning more about writing pedagogy. Indeed, a study completed at the University of Rochester confirms that librarians need to know more about writing pedagogy in order to "assist students through the final steps of preparing a well-crafted research paper" (Foster & Gibbons, 2007). Collaboration between the library and the writing center helps achieve this goal.

Another opportunity for collaboration between writing centers and libraries is in the training of peer tutors. This paper evaluates a case study of librarians and writing center coordinators working together to train writing tutors in key concepts of information literacy. It discusses the development and importance of the collaboration, which led to a series of tutor training sessions devoted to information literacy. It also describes hands-on activities that convey the importance of the evaluation of sources in the context of disciplinary discourse, with the overarching purpose of empowering writing tutors to disseminate concepts of information literacy. The paper argues that librarians can learn about the practice of student

writing from both tutors and instructors.

## SETTING

The authors' institution is defined by its mission statement strictly as a liberal arts college devoted to the undergraduate, with only a few pre-professional programs and no graduate programs. Its most popular programs are business administration, theater, psychology, media & communication, biology, and English. For many years the college has eschewed a separate writing curriculum in favor of a first-year seminar in which faculty from across the disciplines teach the basics of essay writing, and are encouraged (though not required) to include secondary research or some information literacy component. As part of the writing across the curriculum program, students are also required to take upper-level courses across the disciplines designated as writing courses, with a focus on writing in the context of a particular discipline.

Writing tutors are selected from across the disciplines and trained in their first or second year to work in one or more of the following roles: as a writing assistant integrated into a first year seminar; as a writing associate in an upper-level writing intensive course in the tutor's major area; as a tutor in the drop-in writing center; or as a writing mentor working one-on-one with a student over the course of a semester. In the writing center, tutors see students in all disciplines, but the tutor's declared major is displayed on the center's schedule if students wish to seek out a specialist in their discipline.

To become writing tutors, students must take a writing theory course taught by faculty in the English department who are trained specialists in the teaching of rhetoric and composition. However, the writing program is not housed in the English department, and the writing center is not physically located in the English department. The emphasis is truly interdisciplinary, a conscious move by the English department and college administrators to share the teaching of writing among all disciplines.

## HISTORY OF COLLABORATION

Several years ago, a former director of the writing center invited the humanities librarian (one of the authors of this paper) to instruct new peer tutors in library research as part of a writing theory course required of all writing tutors.<sup>1</sup> In this early incarnation of library involvement in tutor training, the emphasis was on basic database searching and on properly citing sources as a means to avoid plagiarism.

Then two English faculty, with formal training in rhetoric and composition, decided to author a writing primer. They invited the same humanities librarian to write a chapter on evaluating sources for a research paper. The primer has been widely distributed, appearing in multiple revisions under the title *Writing Analytically*.<sup>2</sup> The book highlights the value of collaboration between many disciplines, inviting librarians and professors alike to contribute their expertise to a discussion of the writing process.

With the publication of *Writing Analytically*, the writing center found two new co-directors in the professors who authored it. In the Spring 2008 semester, they approached the humanities librarian and the social sciences librarian for assistance in developing a library component to train writing tutors. After several discussions between the teaching faculty and librarians, two significant shifts in the direction of the training emerged. First, the training would take place in two sessions rather than one. One session would focus on disciplinary discourses (thus the inclusion of two librarians, each employing subject expertise) and another on evaluating resources. Second, the training deemphasized discussions of plagiarism, the centerpiece of earlier training. The faculty members agreed to attend the sessions, but wanted the librarians to team-teach the sessions as the professors remained at the periphery. One of the primary goals of the training was that the tutors would meet the librarians, see them in action, and gain the confidence to work collaboratively.

As a side note, while the writing center has long been housed in the library, traditionally it was

located far away from the reference department. Interaction was sporadic at best. At the invitation of the new library director, writing center administrators agreed that the center should be moved not only closer to the reference department, but actually into a shared space. At this writing, a major renovation to the reference offices is taking place. In the newly appointed space, the Writing and Information Consultation Center, the writing center administrator's office and reference offices surround a common area for tutoring and reference appointments. The goal is to continue the positive interaction that took place in the library sessions, which are discussed in detail below.

## COURSE DELIVERY

### *Goals and Objectives*

The faculty team-teaching the writing theory course devoted two consecutive 75-minute class periods to the library sessions. The goals for the sessions were first, to communicate information literacy concepts and principles to the students, who could then as tutors share what they learned with other students; and second, to establish relationships with the soon-to-be tutors and enable future collaborations. In the sessions, lecture was kept to a minimum. Instead, carefully orchestrated activities and group discussion were favored. The intention was to engage students in intellectually rigorous activities that are often not possible in more traditional library instruction sessions. To keep the sessions relevant for the students and their future work as writing tutors, the activities and discussion were framed in terms of potential tutor/tutee interactions.

### *Session One*

The focus of the first session was the concept of disciplinary discourse. As writing tutors, these students may regularly be asked to work with unfamiliar topics and fields of study. The session's activities were designed to expose students to the idea of disciplinary language and style, and to begin a discussion of the priorities of various disciplines as expressed in citation, organization, and publication patterns. The session's primary objective was to illustrate the

distinction between research papers in the social sciences and those in the humanities. This included covering the differing conventions of each style of paper. The session included two activities: journal article comparison and citation building.

**Journal article comparison.** For the first activity, students read an article from the humanities.<sup>3</sup> In small groups, students reviewed the article and identified its key characteristics by considering the following questions: Into what discipline does the article fall? How is the article organized? What is the main idea, and how does the article go about examining it? After a few minutes for review, the class discussed their findings and thoughts. Students then read an article from the social sciences.<sup>4</sup> They were asked to return to their small groups to review the second article and consider the same questions, finding its salient characteristics, especially as compared to the first article. After some review, the class again regrouped to discuss their findings. Students were quick to note key differentiating features, such as structural differences, inclusion/exclusion of signposts, and authors' strategies for including secondary research.

**Citation building.** The session's second activity required students to build a citation. After a brief presentation on major citation styles (i.e., APA, Chicago, and MLA) and preferred styles by discipline, handouts with examples of the citation formats were distributed and students were referred to online resources like the University of Wisconsin-Madison Writer's Handbook (<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/>) and Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>). Each small group was assigned a different item (e.g., chapter in an edited book, book review, Web site). Based on the subject matter of the item, students were asked to pick the most appropriate style and construct the citation. The class regrouped to discuss the accuracy of the citations, problems they encountered, and the conventions of citation style, as well as what each style can indicate about the priorities of the discipline using it. For example, APA style, in

both citation and writing, prioritizes an "economy of expression" that requires exactness and clarity (American Psychological Association, 2001, p. 34). Similarly, students noticed that APA style finds publication dates of a higher priority than does MLA style.

### *Session Two*

The second session featured hands-on experience with the nuances of evaluating resources, a cornerstone of information literacy standards. The discussion and activity were framed with these questions: Considering the glut of available information, how does one know what information is considered respectable and what isn't? How does one select appropriate sources? The session began with a discussion of the characteristics of scholarly sources generally considered most appropriate for research papers, including authorship/expertise, authority, tone/language, intended audience, format, editorial process, documentation, depth, and appearance/special features. A short discussion of some characteristics that certain disciplines may prioritize over others (e.g., monograph vs. periodical) followed. To help illustrate the point, students were asked to consider the bibliographies of the articles used in the first session's journal article comparison activity. While multiple activities were originally planned for the session, the item evaluation exercise proved to be very intensive and required the entire allotted time.

**Evaluating for authority and appropriateness.** Students in small groups were given two items on a similar topic. They were asked to compare the two items, judge how the relevant discipline would evaluate their authority, and consider which was more authoritative. Students were also directed to independently reflect on the value and appropriateness of each source and consider what purpose each could serve in a research paper or in the research process. It was requested that they consider if, within a given discipline, there were any ways that an item deemed less scholarly could still be useful. For example, a popular magazine article could be

used to gauge public sentiment.

This activity was designed to expose students to four main concepts: independent vs. comparative assessment, appropriateness vs. authority, peer review, and disciplinary discourse. By comparing two items, students explored the importance of independent, as well as comparative, assessment. The independent assessment allowed the students to examine the item against a set of established criteria. The comparative assessment deepened the analysis by encouraging the students to see what one item has that the other does not, and vice versa. By comparing the items, students recognized that utility can trump academic rigor and that the evaluation process must always consider the specific information need at hand. It may be, for example, that a distinctively unscholarly document will serve the desired purpose. Ultimately, this activity made the evaluation process more problematic: one can arrive at criteria for evaluation, but one must consider the information need in applying those criteria. Many of the items students compared brought the peer review process to the forefront. The peer review process is highlighted as a hallmark of scholarly publishing, but the means by which traditional review takes place can be called into question in light of authoritative blogs and other nontraditional publications. Finally, students were again asked to consider the discourse of a discipline, which demonstrated that the valuing of information can be largely contextual, depending on the discipline in which it is being examined.

The following is one example of an item pair that was used and the issues it targeted. A different pair of resources was assigned to each small group. Each pair featured different resource types or different elements from the criteria listed above (e.g., a Wikipedia article vs. a signed encyclopedia article, recent criticism vs. a "classic" study, a primary document vs. secondary history, scholarly criticism vs. a high-brow magazine, etc.). Students were not informed of their document "types" in advance; rather, they were to identify them on their own as such investigation is an important part of the

evaluation process. (See Appendix for a complete list of items used in this exercise.)

#### COMPARE: BLOG POST VS. NEWSPAPER ARTICLE (Political Science)

Bracy, G. (2006, December 9). Things fall apart: No child left behind self-destructs. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved April 23, 2008 from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gerald-bracey/things-fall-apart-no-child\\_b\\_35935.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gerald-bracey/things-fall-apart-no-child_b_35935.html)

vs.

Finn, C. E., Jr. (2008, March 30). 5 myths about the education law everyone loves to hate. *Washington Post*. Retrieved April 23, 2008, from LexisNexis Academic.

*Issues: Bias, Authorship/Expertise, Authority, Depth*

Note: The Huffington Post is generally considered to be liberal blog/news site, albeit a reputable one. The Washington Post is a paper of record, but considered by some to be a liberal newspaper. Gerald Bracey is an academic, has been a fellow at various educational institutes, and is well-published in the field. Chester E. Finn, Jr. is also an academic, has been a fellow at various institutes, including the conservative Hoover Institution, has held a number of governmental posts, and is also well-published in the field. This pair also provides an opportunity to compare/contrast against authority of personal blogs.

After some review, students reported their findings to the class, giving the group an opportunity to consider the item distinctions and nuances of their evaluation.<sup>5</sup>

#### ASSESSMENT

At the end of the two library sessions, both students and faculty informally expressed very positive reactions. In an effort to give students a

chance to be tutors and to see how the sessions affected their work with tutees, formal feedback was delayed until the end of the following semester.

The short survey asked students to reflect on the library sessions by qualitatively assessing their utility and considering how they could have been more helpful. Six of the twenty students (30%) responded. While respondents in general reported that they enjoyed the workshops and appreciated the opportunity to build a relationship with librarians, their feedback indicated that some of the librarians' intentions and expectations were not clearly communicated. Some students' responses indicated that they grasped the importance of resource evaluation, but others expressed that they had expected the focus to be on finding resources, and seemed to miss the value and impact of the sessions' topics. One student had anticipated that the workshop would be a repeat of one of the several library instruction sessions she had already attended that focused on identifying databases to use in various disciplines. In contrast, the librarians wanted to discuss disciplinary discourse as it relates to resource evaluation as part of the broader picture of information literacy. It seems this misunderstanding may have left tutors confused about the purpose of the workshops.

Responses also indicated that the time lag between the sessions and the assessment a full semester later made it difficult for students to accurately recollect and reflect on the topics and activities. The long interval may also account for the low response rate. In light of how actively engaged and thoughtful students were during the sessions and the positive feedback communicated directly afterward, it is reasonable to say that students did begin to understand the concepts of disciplinary discourse and resource evaluation, and perhaps were able to assimilate some of these ideas into their thought processes and work. To remedy these incongruities in future training sessions, the authors will consider a more intentional discussion of the objectives. They will also consider looking even more closely at the

application of evaluating resources at the disciplinary level by working with more practical, personally relevant examples.

While the authors anticipate leading library sessions for tutors in training again, it is important to continue conversing with the faculty who administer the writing program. These faculty administrators play a strategic role in shaping the teaching of writing on campus, and likewise influence the integration of information literacy instruction into the writing curriculum. The instruction of writing tutors will be continue to be an important part of the conversation, but it will also include discussion of the most effective methods for teaching important concepts of information literacy. Furthermore, soliciting faculty perceptions of the interaction between tutors and students as well as tutors and librarians will be valuable. In short, what needs are still not being met? For example, is the writing center a sufficient place for teaching these concepts, or is student traffic too sparse? Is the communication between librarians and tutors open enough to provide a comfortable pedagogical exchange, or is there hesitation from lack of approachability and even a degree of territorialism?

#### INFORMATION LITERACY STANDARDS

A primary goal in developing the library sessions was to share information literacy concepts and principles with students. Accrediting bodies are increasingly asking for information literacy to be incorporated into the curriculum (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2006). In addition, the *American Competitiveness in the Internet Age Report* (Perrault, 2007) called for a commitment to information literacy as a means to advance the United States' competitive edge.

These calls for information literacy, some of them urgent, reveal that such a topic does not appear inherently in curricula, but must be intentionally placed there. This experience shows that information literacy instruction can be well received if information professionals collaborate with teaching faculty,

whether at the level of course design or in creating specific activities.

In the authors' estimation, the activities and discussion described above communicated at least three of the five Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education outlined by the Association of College and Research Libraries (2000): The information literate student determines the nature and extent of the information needed; The information literate student evaluates information and its sources critically and incorporates selected information into his or her knowledge base and value system; The information literate student understands many of the economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and accesses and uses information ethically and legally.

Shapiro and Hughes's (2006) seven dimensions of information literacy also informed the conceptions of information literacy applied in these sessions. The emphasis on exploring disciplinary discourse and resource evaluation directly communicated Shapiro and Hughes's notions of social structural literacy and critical literacy. Social structural literacy is defined as "knowing about how information fits into the life of groups" such as those found in universities and other research communities (para. 21). The journal comparison and citation activities described above dramatically demonstrated to tutors the divergence of academic discourse between disciplines. Critical literacy is defined as the "ability to evaluate critically . . . the strengths and weaknesses" of information technologies, and by extension, of information itself (para. 25). The emphasis is on the evaluative process. The activity on evaluating for authority and appropriateness asked students to assess resources independently and then comparatively for their quality and utility based in a specific research context.

#### REACTION AND REFLECTIONS

##### *Cautions*

In all three of the activities used, most notably the journal article comparison and evaluating for



authority and appropriateness, it became clear that some of the important subtleties were not apparent to students; they only surfaced in the larger discussions that followed, where librarians and faculty were also participants. Students should be told up front that their assignment in the small groups is to discern what they can in the limited time they have, but that the larger discussion will probably contribute greatly to the analysis.

#### *Future Iterations*

While the librarians, as well as the faculty, determined that the sessions and the activities were successful in promoting the objectives, there was also room for improvement, especially in clarifying the goals and intentions to the students. The authors anticipate incorporating a discussion of the session goals in order to lay a foundation for students' understanding of the purpose, utility, and application of the concepts at play.

Future sessions will also include an even closer look at the application of evaluating resources at the disciplinary level by working with more practical examples and activities. For example, students could examine an actual paper with a weak bibliography and be asked to identify what is needed (given the discipline and specific assignment) to address the research problem, rather than working with resources out of the context of an assignment. Working with a paper would more closely mimic a real life scenario for the tutors.

Lastly, administering formal assessment directly after the sessions will help to more accurately assess students' understanding of topics covered. Another assessment late in the following semester could still prove useful in gauging the utility of the sessions to students working as tutors. It is clear now, though, that students cannot necessarily be asked to reliably recall the workshops after such a long period of time.

#### *Benefits, Challenges, and Opportunities*

The most tangible benefit from this library session has been the building of confidence

between librarians and tutors. The library sessions were fundamental in putting faces to names and allowing tutors to see the expertise that librarians possessed in terms of the research process. They also helped librarians see that the writing tutors were truly among the best and brightest of the student body. As mentioned earlier, the writing center is to be co-located with the reference department, in a newly expanded suite of offices known as the Writing and Information Consultation Center. In the class meeting immediately following the library sessions, faculty asked the writing tutors what they thought of the library sessions and of the chance to work more closely with the librarians. The writing tutors communicated great interest and eagerness. Likewise, when librarians were asked what they thought of the prospect of working more closely with the tutors they met in the library sessions, they expressed enthusiasm for continuing a conversation about research with students so committed to helping their peers improve the quality of their writing.

Nonetheless, the real challenges lie ahead. It remains to be seen if the conversation between librarians and writing tutors will continue, and more importantly, if the end product, the quality of researched writing across campus, really does improve. This institution is certainly not alone in its concern about the diminishing return on investment in the area of writing, especially with regard to research projects. More than one faculty member has confided to librarians about no longer assigning research projects, not because this type of assignment is not valuable (it demands a sophistication in writing and analysis that has long been the hallmark of accomplished composition at the college level), but because the quality of resources and the way those resources are utilized in the paper has, at least anecdotally, diminished beyond any one faculty member's abilities to fix. There is a hope on the part of librarians and writing center administrators that collaborative efforts will bring more students to the Writing and Information Consultation Center for a full suite of services that will improve the quality of writing overall, but especially writing that entails research.

## CONCLUSIONS

The writing center offers librarians the opportunity for fruitful collaboration with a cross-section of the campus that involves faculty, peer tutors, and tutees, considerably expanding their ability to inculcate basic principles of information literacy. Librarians bring to the table the essential skills of finding sources and of evaluating those sources for authoritativeness and appropriateness. In turn, librarians can learn from tutors and writing center administrators more about writing pedagogy and process, providing a context for their work with student research.

Librarians can interact with the writing center at several points, one of those being early on in peer tutor training. Such training could include any of the five aspects that define information literacy: a) recognizing the information need, b) finding, c) evaluating, d) using information, and e) ethical considerations.

In this paper, the evaluative aspect of information literacy was the focus, and specifically on an aspect of evaluation that would likely not have been covered well in the bibliographic sessions tutors would already have attended in their own courses: disciplinary discourse. First, students were asked to compare strikingly different journal articles in two different disciplines, thereby highlighting how secondary research is used differently between disciplines. Second, underlying principles of different citation styles were examined to highlight distinctions between the disciplines. Third, students were asked to compare and contrast secondary sources for appropriateness, again with an eye for disciplinary distinctions.

How would this training pay off in actual day-to-day tutor training? That remains to be seen, and a number of assessments are anticipated to help fine-tune our training to provide a tighter practical fit with tutor needs.

One hope is that peer tutors will at the very least come away from the training sessions feeling empowered to make judgments about the effective use of secondary resources in a

student's researched writing. Students often come to a tutor for assistance with conceptualization and clarity, unaware that the problem with their writing may reside in weak source material. It is hoped that training by librarians will help tutors more ably identify such problems and either work with the students directly to fix the problem or invite students to meet with a librarian.

At the most fundamental level, any interaction between librarians and the writing center reinforces the concept that writing and research are intertwined processes. When these processes work together effectively, based on sound principles of information literacy, they model the best in learning and critical thinking.

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APPENDIX: MATERIALS USED IN ITEM  
EVALUATION EXERCISECOMPARE: JOURNAL ARTICLES  
(Psychology)

Haney, C., Banks, C., & Zimbardo, P. (1973). Interpersonal dynamics in a simulated prison. *International Journal of Criminology & Penology*, 1(1), 69–97.

vs.

Harman, J. J., Smith, V. E., & Egan, L. C. (2007). The impact of incarceration on intimate relationships. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 34(6), 794–815.

*Issues: Currency, Authority*

Note: Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo's 1973 article on psychological behavior in a simulated prison experience at Stanford University (better known as the Stanford Prison Experiment) is a landmark study, cited hundreds of times in psychological literature. While significantly older (in a discipline that values currency), to not consider the seminal study in a treatment of this topic would be a glaring error.

COMPARE: BLOG POST VS. NEWSPAPER  
ARTICLE (Political Science)

Bracy, G. (2006, December 9). Things fall apart: No Child Left Behind self-destructs. *Huffington Post*. Retrieved April 23, 2008 from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gerald-bracey/things-fall-apart-no-chi\\_b\\_35935.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/gerald-bracey/things-fall-apart-no-chi_b_35935.html)

vs.

Finn, C. E., Jr. (2008, March 30). 5 myths about the education law everyone loves to hate. *Washington Post*. Retrieved April 23, 2008, from LexisNexis Academic.

*Issue: Bias, Authorship / Expertise, Authority, Depth*

Note: The Huffington Post is generally considered to be liberal blog/news site, albeit a reputable one. The Washington Post is a paper of record, but often considered to be a liberal newspaper. Gerald Bracey is an academic, has been a fellow at various educational institutes, and is well-published in the field. Chester E. Finn, Jr. is also an academic, has been a fellow at various institutes, including the conservative Hoover Institution, has held a number of governmental posts, and is well-published in the field. This pair also provides an opportunity to compare/contrast against authority of personal blogs.

COMPARE: ARTICLE VS.  
ENCYCLOPEDIA ENTRY (Media/  
Communication)

Aubrey, J. S., & Harrison, K. (2004). The gender-role content of children's favorite television programs and its links to their gender-related perceptions. *Media Psychology*, 6(2), 111–146.

vs.

Signorielli, N. (2007). Gender roles on television. In J. J. Arnett (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of children, adolescents, and the media* (Vol. 1, pp. 367–369). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

*Issue: Depth*

Note: While the scholarly nature of the article over the encyclopedia entry is clear, this pair provides an opportunity to emphasize the value of subject-specific encyclopedias. Signed entries with topic overviews and suggestions for further reading serve as gateways to authoritative, scholarly material.

COMPARE: PRIMARY DOCUMENT VS. SECONDARY HISTORY (History)

Hornaday, W. T. (1913). Our vanishing wild life: Its extermination and preservation. *American Memory: The evolution of the Conservation Movement, 1850-1920*. Retrieve May 20, 2008 from [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/consrvbib:@FIELD\(NUMBER\(vg03\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/consrvbib:@FIELD(NUMBER(vg03)))

vs.

Farnham, T. J. (2007). *Saving nature's legacy: Origins of the idea of biological diversity*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

*Issues: Currency, Utility*

Note: At issue here is that an older, seemingly irrelevant, and possibly biased document can be utilized as a primary document in the discipline of history. While the secondary history is infinitely scholarly by comparison, this is no reason to dismiss the much older document that is equally useful, though used for a very different (primary) purpose.

COMPARE: SCHOLARLY CRITICISM VS. HIGH-BROW MAGAZINE (English)

Updike, J. (1993). Reworking Wharton. *New Yorker*, 69(32), 198-209.

vs.

Ammons, E. (2008). The myth of imperiled whiteness and Ethan Frome." *New England Quarterly*, 81(1), 5-33.

*Issues: Authority, Recognition of a popular publication within a discipline*

Note: At issue here is that, within a given discipline, even a popular magazine (non-peer reviewed) can achieve a certain status. The quality of writing is rigorous, but other

than that, there may be no clue to the outsider that this is valued in the discipline. This is where the librarian or faculty member can step in to the larger class discussion that follows and reveal that the *New Yorker* has garnered considerable respect in literary circles (as confirmed in the reference book *Magazines for Libraries*, for example). An additional consideration here is that John Updike is renowned as a literary critic as well as being himself a novelist.

COMPARE: RECENT CRITICISM VS. "CLASSIC" STUDY (Art)

Ruskin, J. (1900). *Turner & Ruskin: An exposition of the work of Turner from the writings of Ruskin*. London: G. Allen.

vs.

Shanes, E. (2000). *Turner: The great watercolours*. London: Royal Academy of Arts.

*Issues: Authority, Currency*

Note: At issue here is that a classic study never goes out of style, especially in disciplines where currency is less of a priority. The classic nature of a study isn't apparent unless one is steeped in the discipline. One could also use Google Scholar or other citation search tools to see how many times the study has been cited by others.

COMPARE: PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE VS. WELL-KNOWN SCHOLAR'S BLOG (Biology)

Dement, W. (2008, May 14). The True Nature of Sleep. *sleepapneacommunity.com*. blog. Retrieved May 19, 2008, from <http://sleepapneacommunity.com/blog/?p=11>

vs.

Kelly, B. N., Huckabee, M., Jones, R. D., & Carroll, G. J. (2007). The influence of volition on breathing-swallowing coordination in healthy adults. *Behavioral Neuroscience*, 121(6), 1174-1179.

*Issues: Authority, Review process vs. reputation*

Note: At issue here is to what extent the reputation of the publication itself trumps the reputation of the author. Also at issue: whether peer review outweighs the reputation of the author. The answers to these questions are complex.

instruction session may be more feasible. The evaluating for authority and appropriateness activity could be modified, for example, so that all students have documents related to the same discipline or topic area, rather than across a variety of subjects. Similarly, giving all student groups the same two documents could cut down on time needed to review students' findings, if time allotments necessitate a shorter segment.

## NOTES

1. While methods of initiating faculty-librarian communication are not the focus here, it is hoped that this paper will inspire such communication by demonstrating that librarians have much to offer the training of peer tutors in working with research-based writing. The difficulty is always in how and when to initiate a particular conversation, but as this paper suggests, it will probably occur in the context of an ongoing professional relationship with a faculty member or department.
2. Rosenwasser, D., & Stephen, J. (2009). *Writing analytically* (5th ed.). Boston: Thomson Wadsworth.
3. Adams, A. (2007). "Painfully Southern": Gone with the Wind, the Agrarians, and the battle for the New South. *The Southern Literary Journal*, 40(1), 58-75.
4. Pineda, A. Q., Cole D. A., & Bruce, A. E. (2007). Mother-adolescent interactions and adolescent depressive symptoms: A sequential analysis. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 24, 5-19.
5. Note that these activities are highly customizable and can be adapted to meet specific preferences and needs. Integrating a segment into a discipline-specific library