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The Power of Solidarity: The Effects of Professor–Librarian Collaboration on Students' Self-Awareness of Skill Acquisition

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Abstract

The ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy* revolutionized information literacy instruction. It asks librarians to instill in students the higher-level skills to navigate the information landscape. Literature establishes the value of shared faculty ownership of information literacy threshold concepts, but it also documents the potential pitfalls of faculty involvement (Franklin, 2013; Julien & Given, 2002; Lechtenberg & Donovan, 2022; Perez-Stable et al., 2020). This article explores one successful partnership, concluding that instructor—librarian collaboration forged around shared histories and structured by codeveloped objectives positively influences students' receptivity to information literacy concepts. As demonstrated by surveys of those enrolled in the course, students' self-awareness of their own mastery increased as they applied threshold skills learned in class. Although data do not allow us to correlate academic achievement to students' survey responses, aggregate results in both academic work and survey responses suggest that these insights led to greater independence for many students.

Keywords: information literacy, pedagogy, threshold skills, backward design, praxis

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The Power of Solidarity: The Effects of Professor–Librarian Collaboration on Students' Self-Awareness of Skill Acquisition

The American Library Association's adoption of the *Framework for Information Literacy in Higher Education* formalized a sea change in information literacy instruction from a skills-based to a concept-driven model (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2015). Students need time and support to experiment with these concepts, more time than allowed by a few isolated library sessions. Literature on teaching has highlighted the importance of collaboration with faculty to offer robust information literacy instruction, but librarians often encounter pitfalls as they are forced to navigate various power imbalances in order to provide students with their information literacy expertise (Franklin, 2013; Julien & Given, 2002; Lechtenberg & Donovan, 2022; Perez-Stable et al., 2020).

By grounding our teaching in an ethos of solidarity, the coauthors of this article—one a professor and the other a librarian—found an easeful collaboration that resulted in positive affective experiences for students. Our praxis includes innovative pedagogical techniques in our respective fields. For the professor, Elizabeth Massey, the focus on threshold skills rather than subject content upends the traditional canon-based music history teaching. For the librarian, Christina Taylor Gibson, prioritizing relationship-building over more quantifiable outcomes extends the implications of the *Framework's* "dispositions" at the explicit expense of skill-building. The experience we offered students rebalanced typical divisions of labor, with Massey taking on skill-building and Gibson the philosophical underpinnings. Our experience indicates that collaboration forged around shared experiences and objectives positively influences students' receptivity to information literacy concepts.

The way we examined our approach's effectiveness was also innovative. Most studies of student responses to library instruction have focused on student achievement in the course or program (e.g., Dahlen & Leuzinger, 2020; Scoulas & De Groote, 2022) but not the dispositions that the *Framework* asks us to cultivate. Our study, by contrast, examines students' affective experiences at three inflection points throughout the semester, training our vision on students' sense of empowerment rather than their demonstration of competency. Surveys of those enrolled in the course demonstrate students' growing self-awareness of their own mastery.

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Pedagogical Philosophy

The ideas in Paulo Freire's 1972 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* grew from the author's work as a teacher and administrator. Brazilian law required voters to be literate, so Freire founded a literacy education program for Recife laborers. His education program threatened Brazil's military dictatorship, which took over in 1964, leading to Freire's exile, first in Chile (1964–1969), then in the U.S. (1969), and finally in Geneva, Switzerland (1970–1980). By 1972, when *Pedagogy* was published, young people were participating in a global movement to leverage their education to advocate for political autonomy (Roberts, 2022). Liberation pedagogy was, therefore, a result of lived experience, and it invited actionable change. Assuming his reader's participation in this movement, Freire focused on how to prepare for the process of liberation in the classroom. Such liberation happens, Freire (1972/2014) tells us, through solidarity:

> Liberation is thus a childbirth, and a painful one. The man or woman who emerges is a new person, viable only as the oppressor-oppressed contradiction is superseded by the humanization of all people. Or to put it another way, the solution of this contradiction is born in the labor which brings into the world this new being: no longer oppressor nor longer oppressed, but human in the process of achieving freedom. (p. 69)

Freire refers to solidarity and unity around a blanket political cause of freedom, expanding his audience along a broad, diverse Marxist model. Yet his philosophy also derives from his own life experiences navigating the vicissitudes of power from various vantage points. In both theory and practice, Freire's quest to connect established knowledge with new concepts suggests that solidarity arises through relationship building.

Like Freire, we approach the project of student liberation out of a sense of solidarity forged at both the theoretical and experiential levels. On the theoretical level, we agree with Freire's push toward a non-hierarchical class environment where instructors look for moments to grant students agency over their own intellectual progress. Our experiences have given us insight into the potential difficulties navigating an academic environment, especially if unversed in the *hidden curriculum*—the unstated cultural expectations in a higher education environment (Flynn et al., 2023). We position ourselves not as enforcers but as allies in navigating what can seem like an undecipherable system. One tool we use to do this is the theory of classroom climate, which is based on three key relationships: student to student, student to content, and student to teacher (Bowen & Watson, 2017). Another tool

we use for implementation is Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT), which asks instructors to hold space for relationships, understanding that the human connection facilitates deep engagement, especially in a post-pandemic environment (Douglas & Gadsby, 2022; Schwartz, 2019).

Some pedagogical techniques interpret Freire's call for empowerment as an urging to maximize student choice at every possible interaction. We read his work differently—as a call to work toward liberation by preparing students for full autonomy. Although there are moments when we provide students with freedom in how they solve the problems the course presents, we are also conscious that liberation is conditional upon an awareness of what to do and which tools are needed to do it. Thus, we narrate a scaffolded series of assignments with increasing self-direction. Just as Freire focused on teaching reading because it was the most direct legal mechanism for his students' empowerment, we concentrate on the skills needed to succeed in Towson's educational environment. We transparently narrate the intended destination to students and invest them as partners in their eventual liberation.

Background

Forming Solidarity

Our sense of empathy for students comes from our experience of the academy as a fraught environment that enforces hidden, class-laden norms. The library and information science literature has chronicled the many difficulties navigating academic classrooms as an occasional information literacy instructor. Librarians and faculty sometimes disagree about which pieces of the research process each should teach (Breland, 2022), and faculty attitudes and assignments have been common points of critique (Julien & Given, 2002). These power dynamics have played into widespread complaints about the ineffectiveness of the one-shot model (Bastone & Clement, 2022; Cook, 2022; Lechtenberg & Donovan, 2022; Pagowsky, 2022; Pagowsky & McElroy, 2016; Pho et al., 2022; Santamaria & Schomberg, 2022; Schlesselman-Tarango & Becerra, 2022). More intensive librarian interventions require collaboration (Sanborn, 2005), which can seem elusive and present difficulties. Librarians have found collaboration uneven, with faculty volunteering to increase student interaction but not engaging with librarians' instruction (Perez-Stable et al., 2020). Additionally, openness to collaboration can be subject to cultural factors beyond the librarian's control (Yu et al., 2019).

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Our collaboration did not struggle in any of the ways outlined in the literature, partly because of our solidarity with each other. We intimately know about bias within the academy from our experiences as adjuncts and mothers. Gibson was an adjunct instructor from 2008–2009 and again from 2013–2018, and Massey was an adjunct instructor at the time of writing this article, working in this role since 2017. In both cases, our arrangements were connected to a desire to balance work and family life. We see our experiences reflected in the "Contingency and Academic Labor" section in *Critical Digital Pedagogy*, and, like the editors of that volume, we can see how our type of marginalization has made us aware of the potential marginalization of our students (jessifer et al., 2020).

Because we had a shared understanding of the difficulties inherent in navigating the academy and were consequently skeptical of the inherited power dynamics of university life, our collaboration's mechanics differed from most. We began discussing the course well in advance of the semester, openly exchanged learning objectives, and experimented with who should teach which skill at a given moment. It was an easy and fluid collaboration that eventually provided us the space to invest in meaningful contributions to student learning instead of worrying about the professor–librarian relationship.

Institutional Context

Towson University is a public institution in Maryland. Its student body is diverse in nearly every understanding of the term. The school prides itself on supporting first-generation college students, recruiting widely from communities in and around Baltimore, the closest metropolitan area. Students are often working their way through school. Many are non-traditional: transferring from community colleges, starting a degree after a break from academics, and/or navigating parenthood or other caregiving responsibilities. Statistics tracking racial diversity report a population of 30% African-American and over 10% Latinx (Towson University, n.d.). Although there are no statistics on gender identity, our sense from student interactions is that the campus supports a substantial queer community.

As cisgender white women with multiple degrees obtained under relatively supportive environments, we do not fit in most of the categories mentioned above of diversity. However, our common experiences navigating academic institutions from marginalized positions as mothers and adjuncts give us a foundation upon which to find solidarity and build relationships. We know that the academy can feel hostile and that students sometimes make wise decisions to disengage; we counter that approach by making the classroom a less

dangerous, more honest place. We aim to be transparent about our objectives, practical in our requests, and provide intellectual challenges balanced with multiple avenues for assistance. We also make our friendship visible to the students and invite them into relationships. We choose to do this work because we know that despite the many obstacles to learning, the academy is also a place where students can forge the tools for liberation.

Towson Seminar (TSEM) as a Program: Objectives and Structure

One challenge of teaching information literacy is closing the gap between the skills students possess and those professors hope they have. Students typically rank themselves more highly than their professors (Dann et al., 2022; Kim & Shumaker, 2015; Yevelson-Shorsher & Bronstein, 2018), which may indicate different kinds of skills or ways of exhibiting them than an absence of skills (Kocevar-Weidinger et al., 2019). We hope to encourage students to cultivate self-awareness about their strengths and weaknesses in information literacy. In order to accomplish our goals, we needed to consider closely the course's context within Towson University.

The data for this exploratory study comes from a single, twenty-four-seat Towson Seminar (TSEM) course, required for first-year students at Towson University. TSEM courses satisfy one of the 14 core (general education) requirements for all students and are offered in departments across the university. Instructors choose a course topic from within their discipline, but the university mandates specific learning outcomes. This way, all first-year students build a similar skill set regardless of their course topic. TSEM courses have six learning outcomes, with the first four related to improving students' academic research and writing skills being required:

- Prepare and present a compelling substantive interpretation, argument, and/or analysis of a problem or issue in a research paper.
- Gather and use academic resources effectively and according to the standards and rules of academic integrity in formulating and presenting a substantive interpretation, argument, and/or analysis of a problem or issue.
- Understand and evaluate the nature and possible causes and implications of events, behavior, problems, and issues from an informed and intellectually balanced perspective.

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- Connect concepts and empirical evidence in logically coherent, valid, and compelling ways.
- Understand and appreciate social and cultural differences among individuals, groups, and societies and to engage and learn from others with different backgrounds and perspectives in constructive ways when appropriate to the topic
- Participate responsibly and effectively in group efforts to address and solve problems, where appropriate within the course format.
  (Towson University Senate, 2012)

For bureaucratic reasons, all Music Department TSEMs share the same course number and title of Notable Music Makers with class-specific subtitles that create content scope. The topic of this course, Janelle Monaé, was chosen for its accessibility to non-majors, applicability to the university's student body, and contradiction of the academy's "music canon" (Citron, 1993). Monaé is a Black queer actress and popular music singer whose style crosses between R&B, pop, funk, hip hop, and soul. Both the class topic and the pedagogical goal to consider power relationships align with the larger Music Department's Statement of Solidarity, which "affirms the right of students, artists, and scholars to mobilize cultural and institutional resources in service of social justice initiatives" (Towson University Department of Music, 2023).

The task, then, was to use music history to fulfill TSEM objectives. Consequently, Massey designed the course to address threshold concepts and skills of musicology, which often align with the *Framework*. For example, in a 2022 discussion among members of the Pedagogy Study Group of the American Musicology Society, participants noted how the *Framework* concept "Authority Is Constructed and Contextual" could simply be rewritten as "*Music* [emphasis added] is constructed and contextual" to make the concept discipline-specific. There is a small but growing number of musicologists focusing classes on threshold concepts and skills; this study's TSEM class fits within that trend. The approach centers on the students and their practical needs and supports efforts to examine the hierarchy within academic programs (Garrett et al., 2011; Haefeli, 2016). Massey reserves more space in the class for threshold concepts—which are easily transferred between "librarian" and "music" fields—by not assessing music-specific content and only using music-specific content as a delivery tool for ideas and skills that help to fulfill the TSEM required learning outcomes.

Description of Collaboration

Given this institutional context, we agreed that the information literacy threshold concepts needed to be at the heart of the new course. Following a backward design approach (Bowen, 2012; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), we formulated educational objectives and discussed the large assignments that would shape the course. Even before this first meeting, Massey had already planned to integrate skill building throughout the course, including assignments on distinguishing and using different types of sources, finding a research question, executing research, reading effectively, and creating a bibliography. Initially, she asked Gibson for details on how one might approach some of these topics, advice about the types of pitfalls students encounter, and input on how to best integrate library instruction into the course. By the end of our first two-hour meeting, Massey settled on one large in-person activity (the library scavenger hunt) and one large end-of-semester project (a six-to-eight-page term paper) requiring direct librarian interaction.

Gibson's visits were tied to specific assignments but were also designed to support relationship-building more than curricular content. Instead of spreading library sessions throughout the semester as is typical for a TSEM, we scheduled two classes within one week, about a third of the way through the term. Before that first interaction, Massey introduced students to various source types through section-specific content, reviewing one source type per class session. Over four classes, students evaluated academic, popular, primary, and secondary sources.

As a result, there was space during the first library session to discuss the philosophies behind searching and applying their knowledge of source types in a workshop setting. The session had three parts, each tailored to the course, and included formative feedback throughout the class period. After Gibson introduced herself, she conveyed the agenda and goals for the session. This is a key element of the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT) Framework, which has been shown to increase student engagement (Addy et al., 2021; Winkelmes et al., 2019). We began with an open-ended, student-led question-and-answer period. Using a Google JamBoard for anonymous posting, students responded to the prompt, "What questions do you have about the research and writing process at this point in the semester? What aspects of the process cause stress or anxiety for you?" In answering students' questions aloud, Gibson was able to group questions into larger categories, signaling solidarity through the room, and refer students to resources throughout campus, enlarging their safety net. Topics generated during the question period guided the rest of

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the session, an approach Gibson made apparent to students by referring back to the concerns that surfaced earlier.

The second part of the lesson focused on search techniques, generating conversation around how students could adapt their established research skills for finding everyday items to finding metadata in specialized databases. After talking through a quotidian internet search, we compared that to a database search. During our conversation, we reviewed source types, emphasizing the utility of background research and the innovation required to research contemporary topics like Monaé. Gibson steered students toward a research guide created especially for the course, scaffolding movement toward independent searching in future courses.

The last activity of the session was "database speed dating." In less than five minutes, students worked in groups to connect a research need with an ideal database. Then, the students presented their findings to the whole group, allowing discussion about the various options available. Because students knew they were preparing for the scavenger hunt in a few days, we thought through how these findings might aid that exercise, imbuing the lessons taught with direct application.

Students came back to the library for the scavenger hunt the following week. Scavenger hunts are common library activities, often chosen because they offer an engaging orientation to library services (Stark et al., 2021). In the scavenger hunt, students built relevant skill sets and gained conceptual-level awareness of how libraries function. By design, this scavenger hunt avoided many common pitfalls typical of the genre (Mccain, 2007; Stark et al., 2021). Students were motivated to complete the hunt quickly and accurately to win a $10 gift card. It required students to explore some of the trickiest mechanics in accessing an item, such as placing an interlibrary loan request, shelf reading, approaching the front desk, and finding detailed metadata (see Figure 1 for an example question). All the questions were directly tied to course content. Having a higher-level understanding of the library's systems empowers students to make choices about how to use the library in a way that works for them and their needs, and making a direct link to the course underscored the relevance to students' research (McNair, 2016). The students worked in pairs, and Gibson was in the classroom to answer any questions. Library staff members at the front desk knew about the assignment and were prepared to engage when needed. The exercise was sufficiently difficult that students needed to use one another, the

instructor, and the librarians around them to complete it, but they also had many choices about how and when to engage with these resources.

Figure 1: Example Question from Massey's TSEM Scavenger Hunt

3. Go back to the library's home page. Select "TU Library Catalog." Type in "janelle monae" to the search bar and click "search."
   a. How many sources are given as results?

   b. Scroll down and look at the location of all these sources. At what library are they all located?

   c. What is the main difference between searching on the library home page "OneSearch" and searching the TU Library catalog?

   d. What is one **advantage** of searching the TU Library Catalog instead of through the home page "OneSearch"?

   e. What is one **disadvantage**?

Instead of a third instruction session, each student scheduled a 15-minute appointment with the librarian about two-thirds of the way through the semester to prepare for writing their paper's first draft. Students came to the meetings with a bibliography, a thesis statement, and a question. The stated emphasis of the meeting was to answer the student's prepared question. However, most meetings evolved into a conversation about the scope of the individual's thesis statement and the feasibility of responding to the thesis statement in a six-to-eight-page paper with the sources listed in the bibliography. Later in the semester, students also had a one-on-one meeting with the instructor, allowing them to compare the types of help they might expect from a professor versus a librarian. These conversations became mechanisms to help students draw on earlier experiences with library instruction, apply the learned skill sets, and implement higher-level learning in their papers.

Survey Instrument

The Monaé TSEM course was first taught in the fall 2022 semester, with collaboration between the instructor and librarian beginning in summer 2022. After reflection and revision at the close of the fall 2022 semester, we prepared three surveys before the spring 2023 run of the course. Towson University's IRB approved all surveys with an exempt

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status. The full surveys are available through the authors' institutional repository at http://hdl.handle.net/11603/32446. Spring 2023 course participants were provided Survey 1 on the second session of the class (Thursday, February 2), Survey 2 on the class session preceding the mid-semester spring break (Thursday, March 6), and Survey 3 on the final session of class (Tuesday, May 16). Of the 24 students enrolled in the spring 2023 course, 21 elected to complete Survey 1, 18 completed Survey 2, and 17 completed Survey 3. The overall decrease in respondents is explained by reduced attendance on those days.

Our main goals for the survey were to understand student confidence regarding research and writing skills and their sense of relationship with the instructor and librarian. All surveys shared 16 basic questions so student perceptions could be tracked across the semester. At the end of each survey, one or two unique questions were targeted for that point of the semester.

Results

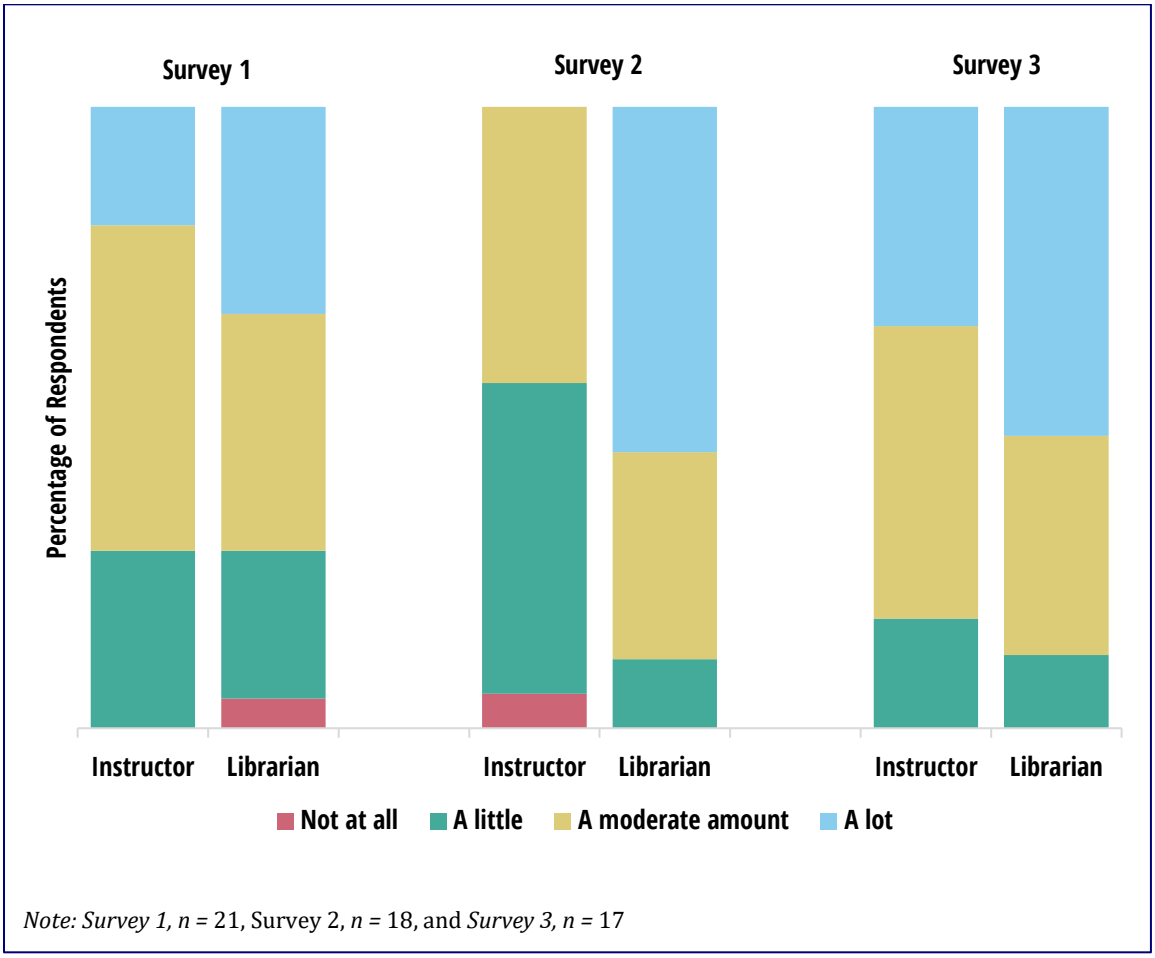
Survey results demonstrate that we met most of our goals to cultivate relationships in the classroom and teach threshold, transferrable skills. Analysis of results includes a discussion of student responses, which reflect their self-perception. We also analyze student responses based on our experiences with the course.

Liberating Relationships in the Academy

The data suggest that a conscious effort to give students agency in the course structure, assignments, and relationships with the instructor and librarian allowed students to feel empowered. At the beginning of the semester, students reported high engagement with the course topic. Of the 17 students who elected to respond to the Survey 1 specific question, "What interests you about this course," eight students specifically named Janelle Monaé for their answer; five additional answers mentioned music, which could be an oblique reference to Monaé.

Initial interest in the topic likely correlates to students' sense of empowerment in course selection, thus contributing to a positive classroom climate. A sweeping 20 (out of 21 responding) in Survey 1 reported feeling that they had either moderate or high levels of control over their learning in the course as well as Towson in general. Survey 1 responses similarly demonstrate high levels of perceived approachability for both instructors and librarians.

Figure 2: Perceived Approachability of Instructor and Librarian



Note: Survey 1, n = 21, Survey 2, *n* = 18, and *Survey 3, n* = 17

Data pertaining to the perceived approachability of the instructor and librarian in Survey 2 and 3 support the idea that students had a positive experience when given agency over their learning, as seen from the context around approachability ratings. For example, in Survey 2, the instructor was perceived as less approachable than in Survey 1 (see Figure 2). Survey 2 followed in-class group presentations on a topic assigned by the professor, which was an early step in a scaffolded progression toward increased agency. Students, however, did not have the context around the assignment and only experienced the restriction in choices, perhaps among the reasons they ranked the instructor as less approachable at the mid-semester than at the start of the semester. Additionally, while most students reported that the mid-semester presentation helped a "moderate amount" when rating the effectiveness of all course assignments in Survey 3, not a single student thought that it significantly contributed to their learning. Survey 2 responses demonstrate higher levels of perceived

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approachability for librarians than Survey 1. This survey was taken in close proximity to the three days spent at the library, with students having several encounters with both Gibson and other librarians. Because Gibson spends so little time in-person with the class, establishing a student-led relationship is an immediate focus of her interactions, as reflected in the survey results.

Survey 3 responses, collected on the final day of class, demonstrate sustained feelings of approachability for librarians and increased feelings of approachability regarding instructors. This improved score, especially compared with Survey 2, is correlated with the increased sense of agency students felt and associated with the classroom environment by the end of the semester. Students had complete freedom over their individual research paper topics and had one-on-one meetings with both the librarian and instructor regarding their papers. Students reported that both meetings, but especially the writing meeting with the instructor, significantly contributed to their learning. Both the librarian and the instructor sought to validate student interests and goals regarding their research papers and provide practical advice and efficient direction for their next steps. Students' informal comments and formal survey responses suggest that they appreciated opportunities to discuss their ideas in collaboration with subject experts.

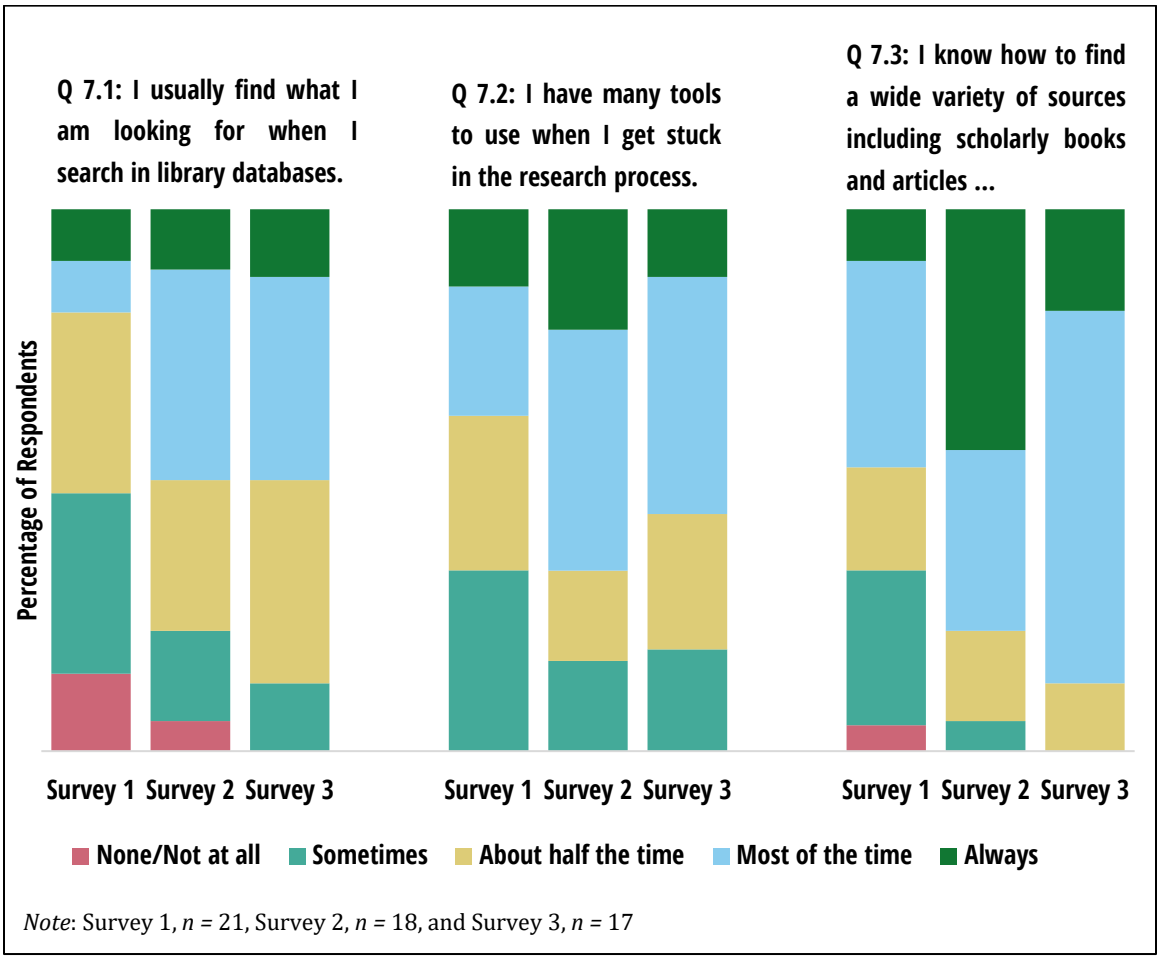
Acquisition of Threshold Skills

Perceived positive relationships and correlations of student agency are also related to the evidence supporting student acquisition of threshold, transferrable skills. Comparing data across all three surveys, students sensed an overall improvement in skills surrounding library database usage as well as discernment of source reliability (See Figures 3 and 4). Furthermore, in a unique question for Survey 3, students conveyed confidence regarding independent research and writing. One student indicated learning and growth in their statement, "I feel better than I did at the start of the semester," and another connected their feeling of independence to "the assignments we did [that] helped [them] learn."

Students reported lower levels of competence in Survey 3 than in Survey 2. We read these results as an indication of growing self-awareness cultivated through applying skills initially covered earlier in the semester. In Survey 2, taken soon after the three days in the library and the application of library skills to the group presentation, student responses indicate that they perceived themselves to be equipped in terms of awareness of research tools, finding a variety of sources, determining source relevance, and the pace of the research process (see Figures 3 and 4). We believe these responses to be inflated, as they do not

match the skills demonstrated in the presentation assignment or classroom discussion; literature supports the likelihood of such a scenario (Dann et al., 2022; Kim & Shumaker, 2015;Yevelson-Shorsher & Bronstein, 2018). By the end of the semester, when Survey 3 was administered, students were working on the independent research paper assignment, allowing them to more accurately evaluate their skill set and how well it met their needs for that assignment.

Figure 3: Student Perceptions of Research Skills



Note: Survey 1, *n* = 21, Survey 2, *n* = 18, and Survey 3, *n* = 17

Interestingly, the reported decrease of skills in Survey 3 did not align with a corresponding decrease in ideas of control or an increase in stress. Survey 3 shows a significant increase in students believing they have "a lot" of control over what they learn at Towson (Q2.4). While two students did report having "a lot" of stress or anxiety about their TSEM class (Q2.5), it is interesting that in the free response question that asked students to name the most stressful or anxiety-producing aspect of the research and writing process, the common

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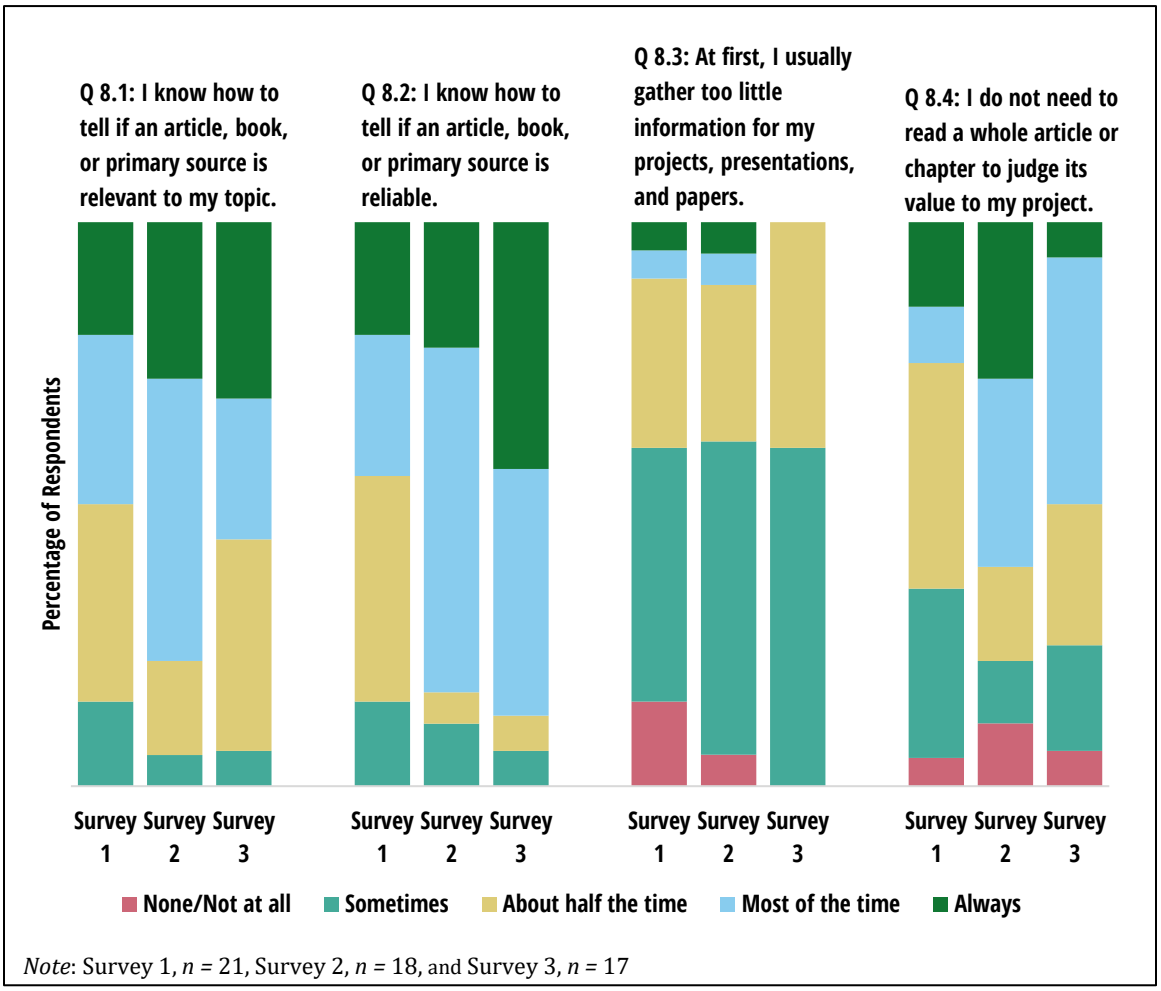
theme was not source skills, but rather citations. Of the 17 respondents to this question, nine named this as the most stressful aspect. Following a citation manual is a very different skill set than the others taught and centrally placed in this course, so students' stress regarding this aligned with instructor expectations. How (and whether) to teach specific citation styles is an understandable source of frustration. Formal citations were not the focus of the class, so, logically, students would feel stress surrounding a new activity, especially one so often mentioned in conjunction with plagiarism, and possible negative consequences.

Figure 4: Student Perceptions of Source Skills



Note: Survey 1, *n* = 21, Survey 2, *n* = 18, and Survey 3, *n* = 17

Despite the anxiety of citations and the natural stress a culminating individual research paper brings, not a single student in Survey 3 reported concern over a grade (as they did in Survey 1) or lack of sleep (Survey 2). Amid the most challenging and weighty assignment, it is surprising that more students did not report increased stress or anxiety. These are the

precise results one would expect from a combination of increased self-awareness and competence; only at that juncture do students feel prepared to face and solve problems as they encounter them.

Conclusions

Ours was an exploratory study of 24 students enrolled in a semester-long first-year seminar. We present it not as a template for others to follow but as an unusual success story that may spark variations in other contexts. We explain the productivity of our collaboration through the principles of solidarity, centering librarian relationship building, and professor development of threshold skills in our work. In keeping with Freire's focus on the practical knowledge his students needed to move toward liberation in their specific context, our goal was to produce students who believed themselves to be equipped for critical research and writing in their Towson University studies. The scaffolded, collaborative environment we provided did not optimize choice in every activity but instead moved toward maximizing long-term empowerment through self-awareness and skill building. By the end of the course, students had many opportunities to experiment with risk, knowing that they could also rethink their work in groups or one-on-one meetings with the professor or librarian.

Student responses indicate that they felt they had acquired information literacy skills and were realistic about those skill sets. At the same time, their perceptions of the course and the instructor and librarian indicate growing agency in the learning journey. The survey results suggest that the willingness to reduce our control in favor of student leadership correlated to students' sense of empowerment. Similarly, integrating library and information literacy instruction into course content and assessments helped create an environment that modeled an exchange of power and an open dialogue of sharing knowledge. Students' perceptions of empowerment and self-awareness suggest that our students are beginning to feel liberated in their academic education.

In the spirit of transferrable skills, we offer suggestions for those wishing to create a similar classroom environment:

- Begin collaboration early: establish transparent communication in the initial planning stages of the course. Share personal pedagogical goals and values.

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- Find solidarity: consciously work on the instructor–librarian relationship alongside the course material and model the sense of shared work in front of students. Look for your common experiences and acknowledge how they shape your pedagogy.
- Be willing to explore non-traditional forms of library instruction within a course: recognize institutional needs and consider other forms of behind-the-scenes librarian or instructor support.
- Fully integrate library instruction within the course structure and content: ensure that learning outcomes for librarians and instructors align and consider the student perspective in terms of skill building as well as content and assignment schedule. If the course concerns other topics, consider setting aside a unit or module for research-centric threshold skills.
- Build toward student ownership: find ways to model shared power, then gradually transfer power to students themselves.
- Cultivate a culture of iterative work: incorporate repetitive assignments requiring consultation with multiple experts to teach a variety of approaches and growth opportunities.

There are several specific changes we anticipate making in the future. While scaffolding threshold concepts and skills appears effective, we may need to communicate more clearly with students about why we assign them particular tasks. The presentation assignment could be better framed, and the prompt could be improved to increase student agency and to be more overt in how the assignment prepares students for the final research paper. We may also reconsider the cost-benefit analysis of certain librarian–student interactions. For example, the one-on-one meetings with the librarian toward the semester's end seem less influential than expected and take a great deal of time to complete. Instead, students may need more instruction about citations, even if that instruction is focused on reducing anxiety by supplying students with ready resources rather than citation mechanics.

We are aware that the process of liberation in the classroom is neither linear nor confined to a single semester. Ideally, students will acquire concrete expertise and a praxis of growth in self-awareness from the classroom. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, it would be interesting to track their progression through their time at the university to measure the long-term impact of our instruction. We can conclude that when given support and agency

to navigate challenging learning experiences, students demonstrate increased self-awareness and competence.

Authorship Statement

Regardless of author listing, this paper was an equal collaboration in both research and writing. We share first-author status for this work.

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