Annual Assessment Report Template
Academic Year: 2013-2014

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A. Abstract

This research and assessment project was designed to assist us in understanding how students conceptualize the academic library after having participated in a particular library activity as part of the first year experience program. This was determined through the use of a rubric applied to required reflective essays. Specifically, the essays we analyzed for evidence of the extent to which students achieved the following four learning goals:
> 1. Students will visit the DePaul University Libraries and gain familiarity with the physical attributes of the libraries.
> 2. Students will complete a successful search for material and check out at least 1 item.
> 3. Students will identify and articulate novel features of the academic library relative to their prior experience with libraries (e.g. physical layout and services).
> 4. Students will articulate at least one way the library can support their success as university learners.

Findings indicate an affective change in students' perception of the library, a better understanding of how to get started with academic research, and an ability to articulate how the library can contribute to their academic success.

B. Introduction and context for this year's report

This project stemmed from a collaboration between several departments (University Libraries, Office of Academic Advising Support, Center for Students with Disabilities, the University Writing Center, and the Office of New Student and Family Engagement) coming together initially to help shape the Common Hour lesson plan around Academic Success Skills. Through the development of the curriculum, the research

question below surfaced and this group spent the following year collecting and analyzing student response papers.

Research Question:
After participating in a self-guided library activity and reflecting on the process, will students in DePaul's First Year Experience program be able to articulate how the library can contribute to their success as academic learners? What can we learn about how the library contributes to student learning and engagement?

Divisional Learning Outcome *(Intellectual Skills and Practical Competence):* Students who participate in Student Affairs programs and activities will acquire intellectual and practical skills that will enable them to live productive and healthy lives during and after DePaul.

> **Departmental Learning Outcome #1**: Students who participate in the Office of New Student and Family Engagement programs and activities will utilize appropriate academic and social resources to navigate their transition to DePaul.

The findings of this project are relevant to our department as we continue to refine the lesson plans for the Common Hour around academic success. Additionally, this project supports Goal One of Vision 2018.

Vision 2018 Goal One: Enhance Academic Quality and Support Educational Innovation
> **Objective 1a**: Focus the entire university community on student learning and success.

DePaul University has a commitment to serving first generation college students as evidenced by the nearly $1/3^{rd}$ of our incoming freshman class in 2013 that hold this distinction. These students often face unique challenges with the college transition due to varying levels of support and familiarity with college practices and procedures. In the NSFE departmental assessment project in the previous year, we found that first year students had a more difficult time naming academic support services and resources than they did identifying social or financial resources. One such academic resource includes the services of the university library and this project attempts to understand how establishing an early understanding of the physical space and of the support provided by the library staff can affect a student's ability to succeed.

Research by Brinkman, Gibson, & Presnell (2013) notes that first generation students perceive themselves as being outsiders, and reported that this feeling created stress. "They assumed that their inability to navigate the library with ease was just another instance of their 'academic cluelessness.'" (2013). Yeager and Walton (2011) note that brief activities or "interventions" which target students' affect regarding their academic experience can have a large and lasting impact on educational achievement. Additionally, Project Information Literacy (2013) reports that in general first year students feel overwhelmed by college level research assignments. Students are intimidated by the amount of information they are dealing with for the first time.

We believe that getting students into the physical space of the library can facilitate student retention and success. Research from the University of Minnesota (2013) suggests that first year students who use the library at least once during the first semester have higher grade point averages than their peers, and are more likely to persist into the next semester.

This group also recognizes the importance of reflection in the learning process. According to Ryan (2012) reflection helps people to understand the context of their learning and use this knowledge to re-imagine and ultimately improve future experience. In addition to performing a physical task, our project asked students to reflect on the experience in the form of a brief essay. One of the goals of this lesson was to create "insiders." We felt our assignment would give students a chance to explore, and potentially fail, within a low-stakes assignment and ultimately allow them to find a sense of resilience and learn to use the library more easily and confidently moving forward.

C. Methodology

After designing the lesson plan and associated assignment, the investigators planned to collect and analyze written artifacts (reflection essays) created by students as part of a required course assignment for Chicago Quarter classes (LSP 110 or LSP 111). This assignment was first distributed and assessed by student mentors leading the Common Hour portion of LSP 110/111. On completion of the assignment, mentors in randomly selected sections distributed an information sheet designed to inform students of the project, and provided students with the option to decline to participate for any reason. Students were informed that their decision to participate or decline would not impact their grade. Students were also asked to indicate whether or not they were 18 years of age or older. Students turned in essays and signed information sheets to student mentors and were provided with a copy of the information sheet to keep.

After assessment by student mentor, all identifying information was struck from essays meeting inclusion criteria, and forwarded essays to the principal investigator. (This step was supervised by staff members in the office of New Student and Family Engagement, who supervise the student mentors.) These anonymous essays were assigned a numeric code for identification purposes by the principal investigator (P.I.). There was no way for the P.I. or research team to personally identify or match students to their assignments. A rubric (see attached) was designed, tested, and applied to 97 student artifacts.

Project Timeline:
Designing lesson plan and assignment, and rubric (Spring 2013)
Refining rubric, requesting research permissions from DePaul's IRB (Summer 2013)
Establishing means of collecting student artifacts (Summer 2013)
Student leaders assign activity, deliver lesson and collect artifacts (September-October 2013)
Artifacts received, N=97 (October-November 2013)
Rubric Norming (January 2014)
Ratings assigned (February-March 2014)

D. Findings/Results and Discussion

1) Results

Advancement Toward Learning Outcome:

Learning Outcome	Number of Students Assessed	Number of Students with Acceptable or Better Performance
Students who participate in the Office of New Student and Family Engagement programs and activities will utilize appropriate academic and social resources to navigate their transition to DePaul.	97	81

Outcome 1: Students will visit the DePaul University Libraries and gain familiarity with the physical attributes of the libraries.
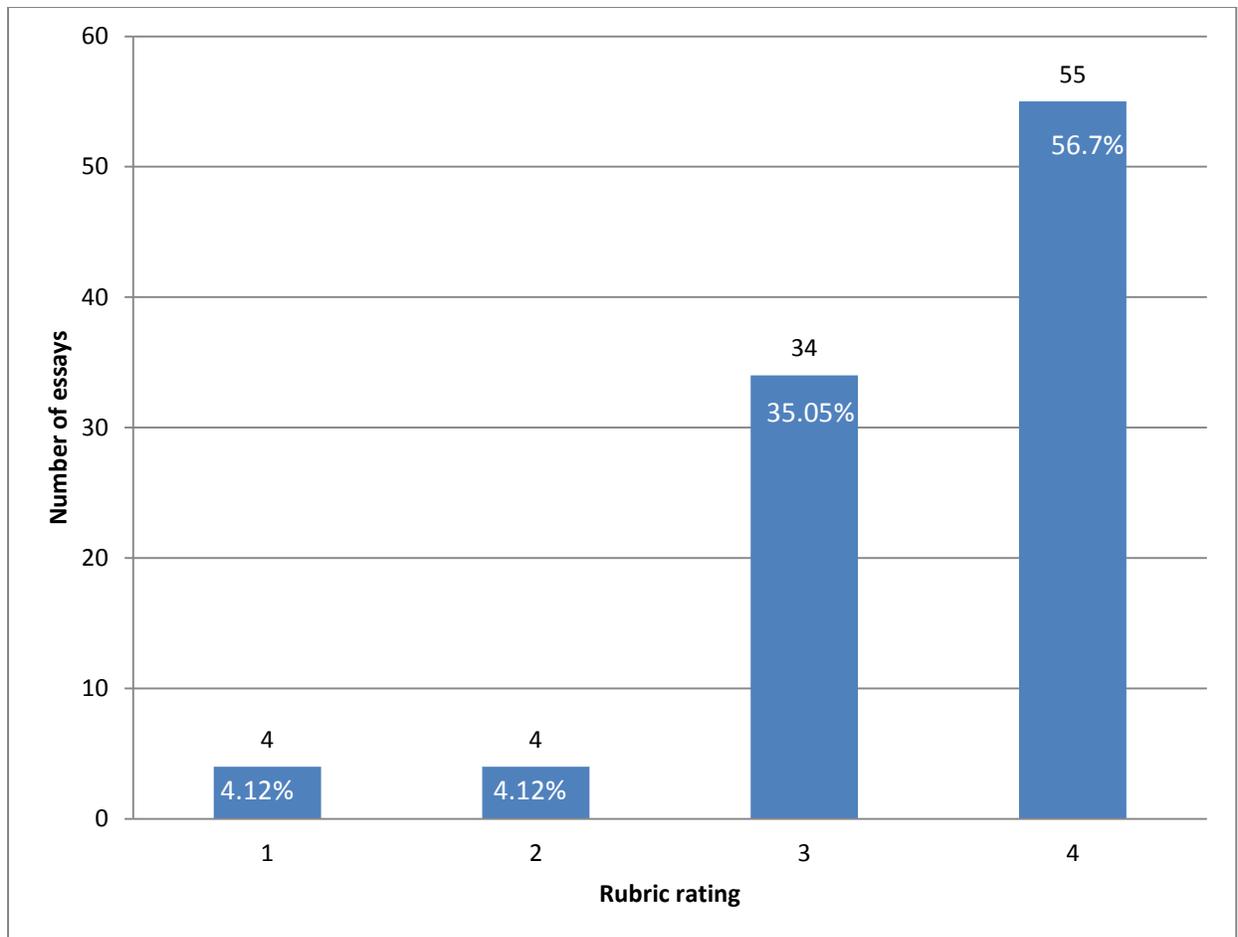
Average score = **3.44**.

Most students (n=**89** or 91.75%) at least demonstrated basic evidence of visiting the one of our library locations.

34 (35.1%) students provided basic evidence of having physically being on site, with **55** (56.7%) providing evidence of additional resources and services, such as our study spaces, research desk, tutoring space, librarians & group work areas.

53 (54.6%) essays talked about interacting with library staff, referring to librarians and library staff, noting that staff was "friendly", "helpful," "kind" and "caring."

29 (29.9%) essays remarked on the quiet. Students also noted our instant messaging service, mobile app, and wayfinding touch screen at the entrance to the library.

Outcome 2: Students will complete a successful search for material and check out at least one item.
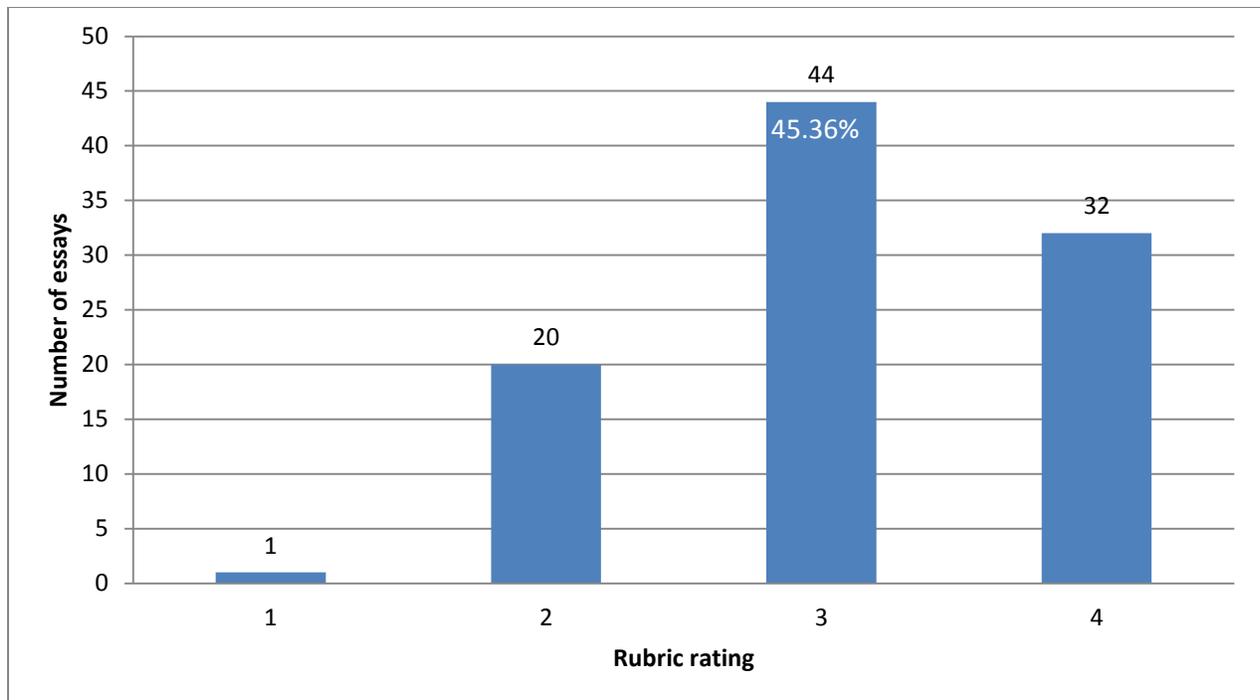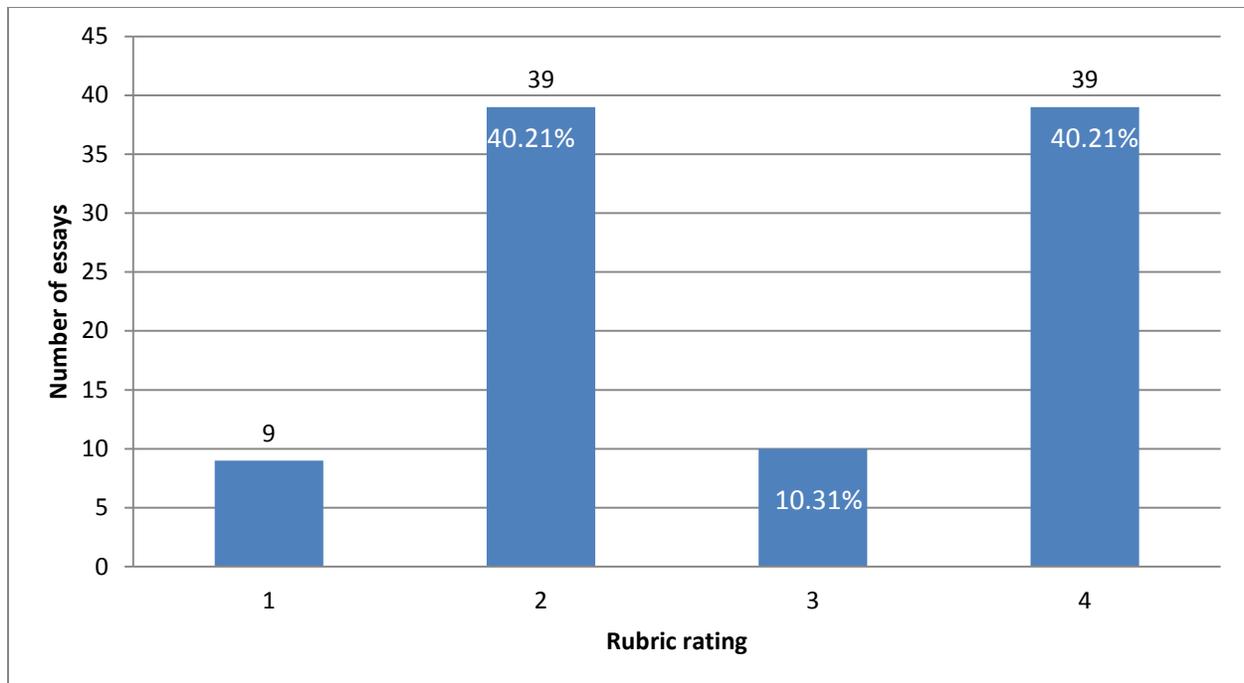
Average =**3.1**.

More students (n=**64**, 65.98%) demonstrated evidence of an initial struggle or some difficulty in using available library resources to find item than did not (n=**32,** 33.0%). A rating of 3 suggested to us that students were encountering something new and destabilizing, and therefore memorable: "I was ecstatic, through some hard work and learning from my mistakes I was able to find the book and realize how resourceful and organized the library actually is." (95)

Students rating a 2 (n=**20**, 20.6%) did not demonstrate evidence of effectively using available library resources to find their items. In many cases, this group of students did not ask for assistance, note signage or use the library catalog (as directed by the assignment), and provided little evidence that they were aware of how a library might be organized, or that a system might exist to help them.

At least **40** (41.2%) artifacts indicated they found the experience easier than expected, and **19** (19.6%) noted that the experience was more difficult than anticipated. Some students sought assistance immediately, while others sought assistance only after an initial setback. For some students it was their first experience finding a book in a library without the assistance of a librarian or parent.

Outcome 3: Students will identify and articulate novel features of the academic library relative to their prior experience with libraries (e.g., library's physical layout and services).

Average=**2.81**.

Most students were not able to articulate in what ways academic libraries were different than libraries they had previously encountered, but many of them expressed other ways in which our library was different than libraries they used before. In other words, even though most students didn't articulate what made an academic library different than a public library, they did articulate what was different or new to them about their experience in our library.

- "My local library, however, does not have a variety of books that DePaul has. DePaul's library has video games, archives, old sheet music, and many other things I would probably not be able to find at the library I went to before."

78 (80.41%) students indicated that they had prior experience with a library, typically mentioning a school or public library. At least 23 students noted the size of our library relative to other libraries they have experienced.

- "This library was so much bigger and it really wasn't sectioned in like teen books, science, but instead they were all scattered all over. The fact that I had to independently find the book and check it out on my own was completely new to me. I usually had my mom with me in the library I had back home."

Among other discoveries, one student noted that information could be found in context: "I didn't have any difficulty finding it, at first when I went to the library I was trying to just get an item so I can write this reflection however when I went to that section of the library not only did I find books related to Ethiopia but books written about places like Burkina Faso which is pretty rare."

Outcome 4: Students will articulate at least one way the library can support their success as university learner.
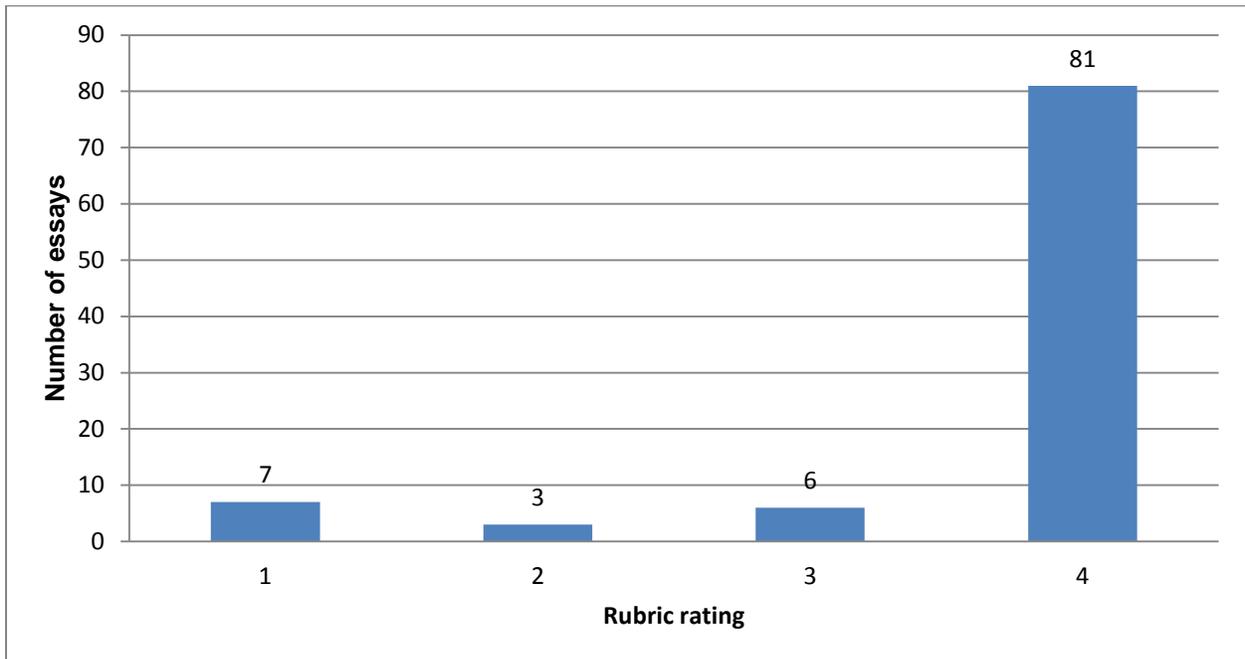
Average=**3.67**.

Since the assignment directed students to find an item, many students articulated that the library provides things (primarily books) which will support their academic success. Students also connected the presence of librarians and quiet study spaces to their success. For example: "Nowadays, most of the classes require a lot of research to be done. The library can be crucial for me as a learner because it offers variety of different sources from which I can get information to support the evidence in my essays or it can simply serve as a quiet place to study and read books for further development." (41)

One also recognized that in addition to finding evidence to support your claims, information can help you develop new ideas: "I hope to learn more on the issue so I can develop my own opinions based on facts from this book." (19)

"I truly believe that DePaul's library is a great resource, and I know I will be trying to make the best use of it. I've heard stories about the music collection. And I'm sure that we all have more interests besides music. The library could be our opportunity for us to be proactive and research whatever interests us. After all, it is easier to learn when it is not for a grade, and you are not under pressure." (3)

Another student said, "I feel as though having a library of this size will be very beneficial to my learning process here at DePaul University. Not only are there the physical books, but there are different databases, e-books, and much more that the libraries help us gain access too! Even if I

don't necessarily need to use the resources within the library, I feel it is a place I could always go if I need space from my roommates to study or just have a little alone time!" (19)

Note: Students were not told that anyone from the library would be reading their essays prior to their agreement to participate in this research.

2) Key Findings

- Even if students are not given specific instruction on how to complete a task, independent learning activities, when coupled with reflection, are effective in providing an orientation to the library in particular and "academic life" in general.

- Many students do not enter college knowing how to find material in an academic library. After this activity, most students have a better understanding of how to get started, and are able to articulate how the library contributes to their academic success.

- Students reported an affective change towards library use, e.g. from anxiety to pride.

- As we succeed in producing library "insiders", we contribute to student's sense of belonging, and their retention and success.

3) Challenges or Limitations

Our research was limited by several factors. First, not all freshmen were assigned the library assignment, resulting in a smaller sample size than originally anticipated. Additionally, creation of the rubric was challenging as this was the first time many of the investigators were involved in creating a rubric for use with formal assessment. Once the rubric was created the testing period was also a challenge. The investigators tested the rubric on a handful of reflection essays and then met to review and discuss the scores. While the discussions did not result in major revisions to the rubric, some small tweaks were made to improve the rubric.

E. Implications/Conclusions

Including library instruction in the First Year Experience curriculum can help situate students in the academic community, and it does not have to be done by librarians.

After completing this assignment, students are able to articulate how the library contributes to their academic success.

Reflection papers can be an effective way to invite students to connect their personal experiences to new academic experiences, and reinforce their identity as successful members of the academic community

Reflection papers can help librarians can gain insight into how students navigate discovery systems and physical spaces, and students' affective relationship with libraries and research.

Future Directions:
This assignment will continue to be utilized in conjunction with the Common Hour lesson on Academic Success Skills as a tool to introduce students to the physical library space as well as the additional resources that exist within the library (librarians, research assistance, tutoring services, study spaces, etc.).

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