

DePaul University Library

Assessment Report

Academic Year: 2023

Date of Report Submission: 11/27/2023

Name of Department/Unit/Program: University Library

Name of Contact Person: Jennifer Schwartz

Names of Assessment Committee Members: Jennifer Schwartz and Ashley McMullin

Part I: Follow-Up on Last Year's Assessment Report Recommendations

The FY22 Assessment Project assessed whether or not the DePaul University Library had purchased a selection of award-winning book titles that are reflective of diverse voices and/or content. By making these selections available to the DePaul community, more students can see their experiences and identities in the material that they consume, and can better engage in the learning process. Ensuring that diverse authorship is present in the collection will also work toward centering voices in scholarship that have been traditionally “othered.”

We found that we generally do a good job of collecting award-winning diversity related titles each year as part of our normal operations. We recommended several actions to improve the process of selecting these books, improve discovery of these books, and improve outreach about these titles to the DePaul community.

In July of 2022, the library hired a Librarian and Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Coordinator. Along with this new position, the library allocated a dedicated funding line within the collections budget to continue to purchase books that serve to diversify the collection. The Librarian and IDEA Coordinator developed a collection policy for this fund to reflect its purpose in collecting materials that provide education, raise awareness, and inspire action related to DePaul's commitment to systemic change. To help market these titles, the library created the “Voices Collection,” which is discoverable within the library catalog. These lists highlight materials from authors who identify as Asian Pacific Islander Desi American (APIDA), African American, Disabled and Neurodivergent, Indigenous, Latinx, and LGBTQIA+. Additionally, the library regularly curates a display of physical materials - as well as a poster display of e-resources in Kelly Hall - that promote items related to monthly cultural celebrations.

These three actions: hiring an IDEA Librarian, earmarking a dedicated budget for DEI books, and promoting our collections for our users, have addressed the core recommendations from our 2022 study.

Part II: Report on This Year's Assessment Project

Abstract

The University Library's FY23 Assessment Report examines the Learning Outcome: *Students attending DePaul University Library instruction sessions, workshops, and engaging with its services will be able to articulate the value of information inquiry.* This year, we chose to evaluate a segment of our student employees who work at our research help desks, our Peer Research Tutors. Each was asked to write a reflection answering three prompts about how they help other students navigate the research process. These responses were evaluated for how strongly the answers showed an understanding of the value of information inquiry. Six of eight Peer Research Tutors were able to successfully articulate answers for at least two of the three questions, meeting expectations for achieving the learning outcome. While these results are encouraging, the learning outcome as written is difficult to interpret, and hard to assess. Ultimately, the library should look to revise this learning outcome in the near future for simplicity and clarity.

Learning Outcome Assessed

The University Library Assessed the following learning outcome:

Students attending DePaul University Library instruction sessions, workshops, and engaging with its services will be able to articulate the value of information inquiry.

Data Collection and Methodology

In order to assess student success with this learning outcome, the library decided to work with our student employees. The library typically employs approximately 15 student employee FTEs at any point during the year, which could be more than 30 students when we are fully staffed. Our work with these students often involves training in finding sources, organizing information, and learning to help others.

We focused on the learning outcome: 'Articulate the value of information inquiry,' which is especially relevant for our Peer Research Tutors (PRTs) who assist in staffing the Research Help Desks, and assist fellow students in navigating the research process. At the time of this assessment, we employed 8 PRTs, 6 at the John T Richardson Library in Lincoln Park, and 2 at the Loop Library.

Each of the eight student employees was supplied with three questions to reflect on the ways they help others with their research. (See Appendix A for the Prompt). Although participation was voluntary, all 8 responded.

Each response was examined and evaluated by the principal investigator using thematic analysis. Responses were mined for substance and key details. The investigator ultimately compiled a list of terms and phrases that when present formed the basis of a strong answer.

Students who successfully answered at least two of the three questions in their responses met the expectations for being able to articulate the learning outcome.

Results

The Peer Research Tutors were asked to discuss their approach to helping students with the following activities:

1. Narrowing or broadening a research topic
2. Breaking a complex research question into a series of steps
3. Appreciating when and how to use background sources

Six of eight Peer Research Tutors provided an overall solid response that demonstrates an acceptable or better performance. These students successfully articulated answers to two of the prompts, and one student articulated three aspects. The other two students were only able to articulate an answer to one prompt. The following chart shows which students were successful with which prompts.

	Narrow and/or Broaden Research	Investigate Research in Steps	Use of Background Sources	Articulated at least 2 Aspects
Student 1			Yes	No
Student 2	Yes		Yes	Yes
Student 3	Yes		Yes	Yes
Student 4	Yes		Yes	Yes
Student 5	Yes		Yes	Yes
Student 6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Student 7	Yes			No
Student 8	Yes		Yes	Yes

Interpretation of Results

Most students (7 of 8) were able to successfully talk about how and why to narrow or broaden a search. They variously discussed the importance of iteration in research, what to do when finding too few or too many results, and using “alternate keywords” as strategies. One example

of a successful answer described how to look at a list of results and use the terms found there to create a better search.

Seven of eight students were able to discuss the importance of background sources. They explained that background sources provide a good foundation for exploring a topic, and can help students get a “more concrete grip on the basics” of their research. One student mentioned that a background source would provide a “broad definition.” Several stated that a background source would provide a “better understanding” of the topic and one student stated that if the researcher was confused by “deep articles” they would do better by starting with background sources.

The second question, asking our student employees to explain how to break a complex question down into simpler steps, was the most challenging to answer. We were hoping to find responses that talked about looking at a research question, and investigating each part of the question independently. Unfortunately, only one student actually answered the question in this way, discussing the importance of investigating parts of the research topic separately, without looking for one article that contains all aspects. I believe that the question was poorly worded, and confusing. If students had been given a better prompt, more may have been able to provide a successful response.

In addition to how well our student employees met this learning outcome, we were also pleased to find evidence of excellent customer service in their responses, which is a key component of their job responsibilities. Six of our eight employees mentioned wanting to make the research process “less intimidating,” “less daunting,” or “more manageable” for other students. Six of eight also stressed the importance of asking questions of the researcher in order to better assess needs and provide better assistance. Asking questions is a foundational skill in librarianship for conducting a “reference interview.” Three mentioned making the students’ research “more meaningful” or finding out “what interests them” about the topic to help focus their investigations. And three used terms “walk them through,” “guide them,” or “invite them to use the databases” that evoke a commitment to peer teaching fellow students, instead of simply providing an answer.

Recommendations and Plans for Action

Results show that our Peer Research Tutors are largely meeting the learning outcome for students to appreciate the value of information inquiry. They are especially well prepared to assist fellow students with research and are able to explain the importance of background sources and how to narrow or broaden a search when necessary. In order to continue to improve their growth and success, we should revise our training material to include special

mention of how to break down complex research questions into smaller, discrete steps. This can be instituted relatively quickly, before additional Peer Research Tutors are hired in 2024.

Further, it would be a good idea to revisit this learning outcome. It is difficult to assess as written. To pursue this change, the assessment librarian will meet with the Instructional Services Librarian and the Reference, Instruction and Academic Engagement Coordinator to discuss the goal of this particular learning outcome, and seek to make a change before the end of FY24.

Appendix A: Reflection Prompt

In 1-3 sentences, please explain how and why you would help a student narrow down their topic if it's too broad (or broaden their topic if it's too narrow).

In 1-3 sentences please explain how and why you would help a student break down a complex question into smaller steps to make things easier.

In 1-3 sentences please explain how and why you would encourage a student to use background sources or other contextual data to better explore their topic.