Assessing the Information Literacy Needs of the Undergraduate Curriculum

Kerry M. Creelman
Coordinator of Undergraduate Instruction & Outreach

INTRODUCTION

The University of Houston is a large, public research university with more than 40,000 students enrolled annually. At the time of project initiation, the UH Libraries Information Literacy (IL) Instruction program consisted primarily of one-shot instruction sessions at faculty request. In order to more strategically embed IL instruction into the undergraduate curriculum, we sought to investigate how IL was required across the curriculum. Texas state law mandates all undergraduate course syllabi be publicly accessible, and UH has a syllabus database, enabling easy access to course syllabi.

Project: A small team of librarians reviewed all undergraduate syllabi from a two-year period in order to benchmark the IL needs of our undergraduate students.

METHODS

1 Download syllabi from every section of every course offered Spring 2012 – Fall 2013; store by department

2 Identify list of IL skills against which to review course syllabi

Basic Searching
- Keywords
- Basic, transferable search strategy

Advanced Searching
- Discipline specific search terminology
- Advanced search strategy & disciplinary tools

Basic Information Sources
- Differentiate between source types
- Differentiate between source and search tool

Advance Information Sources
- Select appropriate disciplinary search tools
- Using primary sources

Research Methods
- Define & engage in literature reviews
- Use disciplinary standards and research methods
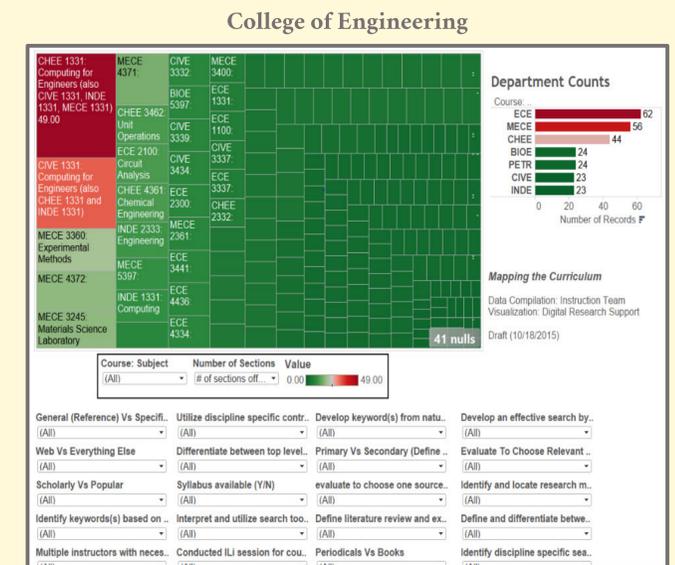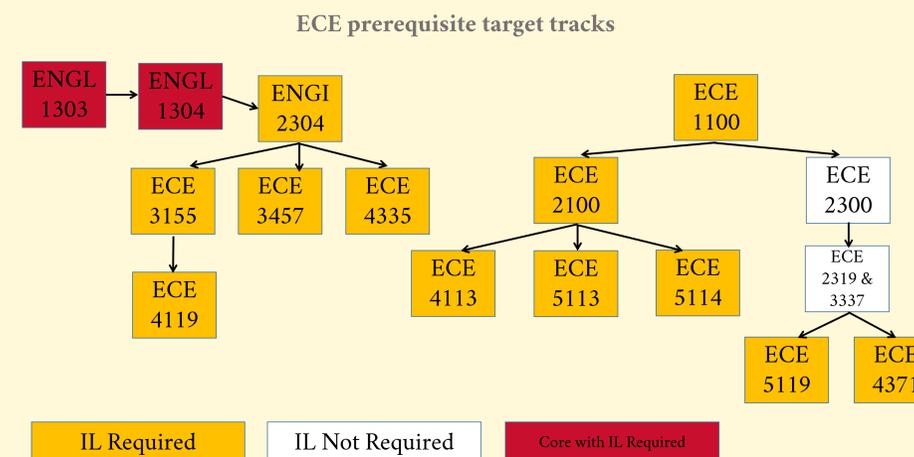
Evaluating Sources
- Explain the purpose of evaluation
- Apply evaluation criteria

Organizing and Citing Info
- Ethical use of information sources
- Consistent use of appropriate citation style

3 Create a review workflow: standardized Excel worksheets to store data by department & a flow chart to facilitate data review & check with Subject Librarians

4 Review Library IL instruction stats against the same IL skills list to map skills taught for specific classes

DATA ANALYSIS

1 Examine Excel spreadsheets for patterns

2 Create visualizations for departments: identify sequenced opportunities within degree plans & departmental or college-level visualizations

ECE prerequisite target tracks

IL Required   IL Not Required   Core with IL Required
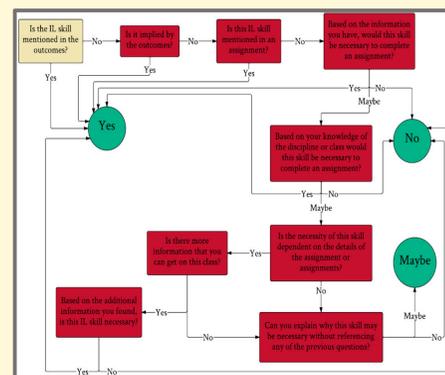
College of Engineering

FINDINGS

- Most departments require at least *some* IL skills within disciplinary requirements to graduate
- Many departments **do not** require IL courses in sequence, making strategic IL instruction challenging
- When collaborating with faculty to provide IL instruction, in very few cases were we meeting the needs indicated by syllabus review and in some cases our efforts were directed towards low-impact opportunities at the neglect of more strategic opportunities

APPLICATIONS

Data has been used to:
- Inform the development of programmatic learning outcomes (in conjunction with ACRL Framework and local assessment studies)
- Identify new opportunities to partner with faculty to strategically embed IL into departmental curricula (by subject librarians)
- Identify new targets for core and high-impact lower-level classes/programs; identify areas to de-emphasize (by Instruction Team)
- Initiate departmental, college, and campus-wide conversations about IL competency and education

NEXT STEPS

- Training subject librarians to use data to initiate conversations with faculty & departments
- Sustainability plan for ongoing data collection & analysis
- Programmatic efforts based on priority targets

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