PLSC 105 (Plants and People): Information Literacy

Dr. Venia Kiprus

A. Types of Information and Their Inherent Reliability

Introduction:
PLSC 105, Plants and People is an introductory plant science course designed to make students aware of the relativity of plants to past, current, and future civilizations. The course fulfills objective 2c and 4 requirements of the General Education Curriculum at WVU and as such adheres to the standards set forth by the WVU Faculty Senate. The course as currently structured consists of traditional lecture presentations, the viewing of documentaries, and in class demonstrations. Evaluation of student performance is gauged with three exams, development of an plant-related article portfolio (10 articles plus a summary of content), and a term paper due in 5 sections (idea or topic statement, list of references, outline, rough draft, and a final draft).

Problem Statement:
Students ranging from freshmen to seniors take PLSC105 and come to the course with varying degrees of information literacy. The two assignments (portfolio and term paper) that require information gathering have demonstrated that many students lack basic skills both in searching for and in judging the quality of information needed—to successfully complete course assignments.
Our primary goal was to understand student skill levels in information gathering and judging the validity of information. Our secondary goal was to improve student information literacy skills by introducing basic concepts in information gathering the information cycle, database searching, and using various library resources and concepts so that students could expertly develop the course portfolio and term paper.

Methods:
An information literacy survey was developed to gauge and compare student information literacy to information gathering experts (faculty). This survey was administered at the beginning of the semester (Fall 2012) to both students and faculty, and again in the semester following the course (Spring 2013). After the initial survey students were introduced to Ms. Noel Kiprus, ‘their Evandale Librarian’. Ms. Kiprus exposed students to topics ranging from the information cycle to database searching in the first five weeks of the semester (2 sessions). Special emphasis was placed on the willingness and availability of Noel as a resource to be used in developing portfolios and term papers. Constructive feedback on the term paper and portfolio by both Noel and Ms. Kiprus were used to further reinforce concepts and library resources discussed in class.

Conclusions:
The limited number of students that participated in the survey (21 students) does not allow us to conclude how class level groups (Freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors) of students rank in information fluency. However, general conclusions on information fluency of the aggregate group of students (student total) compared to faculty (5 faculty) information fluency can be drawn.
- Types of Information and their inherent reliability

- Faculty and students view the appropriateness, accessibility, and quality of various sources of information differently
- Members of faculty and student judge Wikipedia as an acceptable source of information for exploring a term paper topic and rate the reliability of the information found on Wikipedia. However, a subset of students rated it as good
- Book, chapters, org., and technical magazine’s reliability and judgment of quality by students than faculty
- Journal articles are equally held in high esteem by students and faculty, although a subset of students rate the information contained in this source as good and not excellent.

B. Finding Information

The Information Avalanche

C. Information Appropriateness

You are looking for information about your term paper, where should you start? Which of the following resources found in WVulynx do you think would be appropriate and worth your time to explore further?

- Scholarly journal articles
- MountainLynx (the WVU Libraries’ catalog)
- Web of Science
- Agricola (EbscoHost)
- Science Daily (www.sciencedaily.com)

B. Finding Information

- Your background information on how plants and people interact
- You are looking for current research on how plants and people interact
- You need to find out general information about planting fluid using
- You are asked to find a non-referenced (popular press) article
- You are looking for grey literature on how plants and people interact

- To find out background information on how plants and people interact
- To find out what the most important researchers think about the shelf life of cut flowers
- To find out background information on how plants and people interact
- To find out background information on how plants and people interact
- To read up on topics related to Plants and People

- To find out background information on how plants and people interact
- To find out background information on how plants and people interact
- To find out background information on how plants and people interact
- To find out background information on how plants and people interact
- To read up on topics related to Plants and People

Conclusions Continued:
- Most students can readily identify a source to find a specific piece of information
- Most students are not familiar with Web of Science and what information is available through this portal
- Students know Agriola but do not understand what information can be gathered through this database
- Students know about MountainLynx and understand that the database can be used to find books
- Senior students are more likely to identify sources of information in line with faculty than other levels of students

Information Appropriateness

- When going through a list of references generated with an Agriola search, students have difficulty identifying appropriate sources to be used for a specific purpose (term paper).
- Only 1/3 of students correctly identify a source that is most appropriate to use in developing a term paper.

Follow up/lessons learned:
- The information literacy survey we developed needed to be administered to additional students and faculty, for a more complete picture of information literacy in students taking PLSC 105.
- The follow-up survey administration needs to take place at the end of the semester in which the original survey was taken by the students. The lack of response from students (3 students out of 21) to the second iteration of the survey (the following semester) did not allow us to understand how to introduce library resources had a significant impact on information literacy of the students. However, the quality of portfolios and term papers did dramatically improve in Fall 2012, compared to previous years.
- In Fall 2013, we will continue the project with a special emphasis on the types of information students should be able to gather and their inherent quality and reliability. Additionally, students will be exposed to more database searching. We will also emphasize the usefulness of different types of references in developing a term paper.