Assessing Instructional Sessions: Post-Virtual Surveys For In-Person and Virtual Classes
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INTRODUCTION

About This Project
From 2019 to 2021, the Bentley Historical Library's Academic Programs distributed post-virtual surveys to 19 classes that had a formal instructional session at the library. Some questions were included in all survey questionnaires, while others were selected based on the learning objectives for the specific session in which they were distributed. This poster summarizes what Academic Programs staff learned from the surveys and what questions remain.

Reference archivist Sarah McLusky designed the project described here, and compiled, coded, and summarized the results.

About the Bentley
The Bentley holds the University of Michigan’s institutional archives and a variety of collections related to the state of Michigan. It is located on UM-Ann Arbor’s North Campus. More information can be found at the Bentley’s website bentley.umich.edu.

About Academic Programs
Academic Programs staff have long tried to fit some formative assessment into their classes (for example, by asking students about their knowledge of archives at the start of an instruction session). Prior to 2019, however, formal, summative assessment of instruction efforts was not something the library had attempted. By 2018 and 2019, the Bentley was renewing efforts to collect data about its collection, its users, and its interactions with the two. Academic Programs had established close ongoing relationships with many professors. The survey project described in this poster was conceived to gather more uniform and easily comparable data about Academic Programs’ success or failure at achieving learning objectives for an instruction session.

OBJECTIVES

Two main standards were referenced when defining learning objectives. The then recently-adopted SAA-RBMS Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy, and the learning outcomes listed in Peter Caris’s 2016 article “Information Literacy for Archives and Special Collections: Defining Outcomes.”

The below chart maps Academic Programs’ most common types of class session to the corresponding objectives from each standard:

IMPLEMENTATION

Likert Scale Questions:
Based on the class focus that Academic Programs staff identified after talking with the professor, students were given a selection of the following questions. They were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each statement, with 1 being “Strongly Disagree” and 5 being “Strongly Agree.”

Class focus After this class, I understand…
All classes what kind of sources I can find at the Bentley
Analyzing primary sources why a source’s content (for example, its author, audience, or date) is important
Doing archival research why Bentley might not have some of the sources I want
Creating original work based on archival research how to cite sources from the Bentley

Free-Response Questions:
All classes were asked the following two free-response questions:
• What was the most important thing you learned in class today and why?
• What is still unclear or confusing after today’s class?

RESULTS

Scope of Surveys:
In total, 19 classes from 4 different semesters were surveyed, though not all classes were asked every question.

Data was collected during the following academic years:
• Collected Fall 2019 / Collected Spring 2020
• Collected Fall 2020 / Collected Spring 2021
• Not collected Fall 2021 / Collected Spring 2022

Likert Scale Results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class focus</th>
<th>After this class, I understand…</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All classes</td>
<td>what kind of sources I can find at the Bentley</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing primary sources</td>
<td>why a source’s content (for example, its author, audience, or date) is important</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing archival research</td>
<td>why Bentley might not have some of the sources I want</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating original work based on archival research</td>
<td>how to cite sources from the Bentley</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Free-Response Results

When coding the free-response questions, themes were identified with two priorities in mind: What the students thought they understood, and what they demonstrated they understood, through mention of specific tools or articulation of concepts.

Some of the responses that indicated uncertainty about accessing Bentley resources mentioned not understanding the campus bus system or the Bentley’s hours. Academic Programs has long asked professors to remind students that it might take a 15-20 minute bus ride to reach the library. However, we now try to provide that and other “orientation” type information in a brief Google doc professors can share with students, rather than protecting them from it verbally.

The Bentley also hopes to create new video tutorials or research guides that students can refer to after instruction sessions, so they have a written reminder of how to search catalogs and databases. This goal was formulated in part due to responses to the question about virtual delivery of class sessions, in which students thought they might be able to follow along with searches on their own computers. Hopefully, it will also make research easier for students whose free-response answers indicated that they understood search concepts but couldn’t remember vocabulary (for example, understanding the type of information included in a finding aid, but referring to it as a “finding guide”)

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Instructional Changes
Some of the responses that indicated uncertainty about accessing Bentley resources mentioned not understanding the campus bus system or the Bentley’s hours. Academic Programs has long asked professors to remind students that it might take a 15-20 minute bus ride to reach the library. However, we now try to provide that and other “orientation” type information in a brief Google doc professors can share with students, rather than protecting them from it verbally.

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Future Survey Plans
Some of the free-scaled questions asked in this questionnaire were consistently high, meaning Academic Programs’ current strategies are working well. Future surveys will likely eliminate questions that ask students to rate, for example, how well they understand what kind of sources they can find at the Bentley, to make space for other questions that remain unanswerable. Under consideration are more questions about the affective experience of doing research. Do students feel welcome in the Bentley? Are they comfortable asking questions of staff?

REFERENCES

SAA-RBMS Guidelines for Primary Source Literacy.
Mollie Bowles-Terry and Cassandra Kvenild, Classroom Assessment Techniques for Librarians helpfully articulated the difference between the two, and the importance of considering both.

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