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New and Innovative Academic Writing Library Training Programme at Singapore Management University

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| Contents | Cover Story | Other News | Back Issues | ◀ Current Issue | Search   June 2011 No.77

New and Innovative Academic Writing library training programme at Singapore Management University

By Priyanka Sharma

The Li Ka Shing Library at Singapore Management University (SMU) has designed a hands-on training programme to kick-start research and critical thinking skills in students taking the Academic Writing course. Academic Writing is a course that introduces students to the conventions of good essay and term paper writing, and includes a compulsory one hour library training session. For the academic year 2010-2011, over 1,000 students attended the AW library training programme. In addition to the focus on critical thinking, basic searching skills for both subscribed databases and free web resources are shared. Finally, a hands-on exercise highlighting the importance of evaluating resources is included.

■ **Designing the training programme**

The curriculum of the hands-on library training programme was designed with the specific needs of the AW students in mind. In addition to comprehension, reading, writing and presentation skills, one of the goals of the AW programme is to promote the ability to construct and present a well thought out opinion/argument on a topic. The structure of the AW course and its deliverables were also taken into consideration. Data gathered at the end of the training session offered in the past was analysed. Feedback from staff who taught AW was collected as well. One of the key findings was that the students were not using critical thinking skills sufficiently during the course. The training programme was offered to students in week 5-7 of each academic term, just in time for them to begin research towards their key deliverables. The curriculum included the following components:

Brainstorming: techniques to narrow down the research topic to a more specific research area, and eventually to the key concepts of particular interest. Students were asked to use Mind mapping or Journalistic Questions as a means of individual brainstorming, and they were exposed to a variety of tools to support this process.

Creating Search Strings: involves analysing the results of the brainstorming process to pick out the key concepts. The next step is to look for the interrelationships between the concepts. Finally, these concepts need to be arranged into search strings for databases using Boolean, phrase and other search techniques.

Using multidisciplinary databases: In order to streamline the training programme, two multidisciplinary

■ **Online tools**

eLearning Video: entitled 'selecting the best resources for your topic', this eLearning module takes the users though a process that enables them to pick out the best resources.

Search Strategy Builder: the tool is designed to facilitate the use of Boolean logic. The search string generated by the tool can be copied and pasted onto a database to begin research.

Mind Mapping Template: the template creates a mind map by asking the user to fill in a central idea and related concepts. While the template is simple and merely prompts users to start with a central concept and then add related ideas or questions, users like the interactivity of the tool.

Embedded Quiz to teach Evaluation: a multiple choice quiz asking students to evaluate a preselected website has been included in the training programme. This inclusion underscores the importance of evaluating information for credibility, currency and usability. The quiz can be taken during the training programme as well as at leisure.

Assignment Calculator: this tool from the website of the University of Minnesota provides an assignment 'schedule' when students input the start date and due date for an assignment.

The teaching and learning of this training programme was further supported by an activity sheet that required students to record the process of brainstorming, identifying key concepts, constructing search strings and writing down citations of articles located in the databases. The results of a feedback survey conducted at the end of the training programme indicate that the training programme is successful, with a total of 94 percent of the students rating it as Good (61 percent) or Excellent (33 percent). Students felt that the training programme had enhanced their ability to conduct research. Enhancements and modifications to the programme are nevertheless being planned to further increase its effectiveness.

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databases were preselected for use. Students also had the option of using any other resources – both free and subscribed – that they deemed fit.

The above training programme was delivered via a research guide that was put together to serve both as a teaching aid and as a repository (collection) of resources that could be used both during and after the training sessions. The research guide incorporated many innovative online tools to facilitate learning. Many of the tools used were from the websites of the University of Arizona Library, and the University of Minnesota.

▲ Go to top