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Integrating Information Literacy into PHIL 120, Moral Principles & Contemporary Moral Problems

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Information Literacy (IL) Fellows Workshop @
Chestnut Library, Fayetteville State University,
UNC, Wed May 13, 2015

Fellows Presentations and Discussion:

‘Integrating Information Literacy into PHIL 120,
Moral Principles & Contemporary Moral Problems’

By

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Assisted by

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‘Integrating Information Literacy into PHIL 120, Moral Principles & Contemporary Moral Problems’

Introduction:

In her paper, ‘The Conceptual Analysis and Historical Overview of Information Literacy,’ Shirley J. Behrens makes a good case that the term ‘Information Literacy’ was first introduced into academia in the 1970’s in Holland or the US and has been expanding rapidly not only throughout the US and Europe but also globally since the mid-1980’s and especially 1990’s with the help of modern technology. What Behrens and other Information Literacy experts may not know is that while the term is relatively new the concept or idea has been known and applied at least since April 18, 1775 when the British scholar Samuel Johnson famously said: “Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information upon it.” He goes further to explain the second type of knowledge saying: “

“When we enquire into any subject, the first thing we have to do is to know what books have treated of it. This leads us to look at catalogues, and at the backs of books in libraries.” — Samuel Johnson (Boswell’s Life of Johnson)

One of his biographers Boswell explains that Johnson made this remark in response to a question by Richard Owen Cambridge when he observed that ever since Johnson was introduced to his home library, he had been visiting the library again and again with his friends Joshua Reynolds and Boswell.

Rationale for IL Fellowship Project:

Philosophers have also known the value of library and library research at least since 300 BCE when Aristotle became the chief custodian or librarian of the thousands of books or manuscripts Alexander the Great took from Egypt when he conquered the ancient civilization.

Unfortunately, most British and American educators and their British or American-trained educators seem to have lost this 2nd conception of knowledge by overemphasizing what has been called in pedagogy and educational epistemology: “The bucket theory of knowledge,” “The Banking concept of knowledge,” or simply “The recall model.” It does not require any critical reflection or further independent research by the students. The model simply assumes that the teacher or professor has all the knowledge and the student’s only duty is to pay attention and absorb or memorize whatever the professor was graciously pouring into his/her empty bucket. Among critics who first protested this passive and retrogressive approach to knowledge were The Latin American educationist, Paul Freire, author of *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*(1968) and the American Philosopher Allan Bloom who authored the American classic, *The Closing of the American Mind*,”(1987).

In most Third world countries however this passive and uncritical pedagogy continued from generation to generation. Even though there were libraries many, if not most, teachers and

lecturers encouraged students directly or indirectly to memorize their notes from one test to the next. In Ghana for example, university and even some high school students discovered the poverty of such teaching methods and ridiculed with the self-revealing labeling: “Chew-pour-pass and forget education.”

This awareness has informed my philosophy of education and pedagogy whether I’m teaching Critical Thinking, Introduction to Philosophy, Moral Philosophy, or, Introduction to the Bible. While I utilize multiple choice and quick writes for quizzes and part of the midterm tests and the final examination, I always require students to write a short paper of 4 or 5 pages following a well-considered set of guidelines that require all or most of the five tenets of Information Literacy also known as “The ACRL formula.” It involves research in the physical library and on the web with approved referencing methods and guidelines for avoiding plagiarism and other mistakes in research, writing and citation.

In agreement with Dr. Samuel Johnson, quoted in the Introduction, and all the experts or theorists in Information Literacy therefore, I am convinced that “knowing how to find what you don’t know” or ‘Information Literacy’ appears to be one of the most effective tools for expanding the concept of knowledge globally and throughout a person’s life by emphasizing that the purpose of education is not simply to help students memorize some truths or theorems and pour it all back during exams, or to find a job (although that’s important,) but to create and facilitate their quest to becoming life-long learners. This desire of becoming a life-long learner also explains why Philosophy has long been perceived as “a way of life.”

This, in short, explains why I became interested and committed to becoming a Library Fellow this year so I could enhance my own awareness and skills and those of my students in Moral Philosophy who want to advance their knowledge and skills in Information Literacy.

Course Description:

Moral Principles and Contemporary Moral Problems (MPCMP) reviews moral principles and theories and applies them to such contemporary moral issues as abortion, war, capital punishment, discrimination, poverty, and the environment, etc. Analyzing and evaluating the variety of moral arguments brought to bear on such problems is a major focus of the course. Students are expected to demonstrate knowledge and application of principles of ethical and civic responsibility.

Text Book: *Doing Ethics: Moral Reasoning and Contemporary Issues*. 2nded. New York: Norton, 2013, by Vaughn, Lewis

Core Course Learning Outcome:

Ethics and Civic Engagement: Students will develop a personal system of ethics and morality and demonstrate it in daily self-discipline and interpersonal relationships, in volunteer work, and through participation in organizations; they will synthesize source material from a variety of disciplines to understand and apply theories of morality and ethics.

This course PHIL 120 (previous classified as PHIL 320) has been redesigned to meet the five ACRL standards for Information Literacy (I.L.) starting January 2015.

1. Determine the extent of information needed
2. Access the needed information effectively and efficiently

- Introduced to Academic Search Complete and Lexis-Nexus databases
3. Evaluate information and its sources critically
Make determinations about whether sources are credible or reliable, what biases might inform their sources, etc.
 4. Use information effectively to accomplish a specific purpose such as engaging with arguments about a specific moral issue or multiple issues.
 5. Understand the moral, civic, legal, and socio-economic issues regarding the use of information

Student learning Outcomes:

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- A. Identify the ethical responsibility of the individual and its relevance to the welfare of a community in general.
- B. Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of honesty, fairness, and respect in interpersonal relationships etc.
- C. Demonstrate how a set of conceptual tools may be applied to a wide range of ethical and political related issues.
- D. Synthesize source material from a variety of disciplines which support ACRL standards 1 and 3 to arrive at a coherent knowledge of ethical and moral systems from earliest history to the present day,
- E. Characterize and evaluate several popular theories of what makes acts right or wrong and apply them to concrete situations,
- F. Analyze and evaluate the variety of moral arguments and viewpoints brought to bear on such contemporary moral problems as capital punishment, abortion, discrimination, terrorism and war.
- H. Examine the relevance of ethical theories and principles to civic responsibility.
- I. Impartially consider ideas and practices that differ from their own, using differences as opportunities to compare and contrast ethical and moral systems,
- J. Create projects and participate in discussions on values questions, particularly in regard to their chosen major,
- K. Critically reflect on the moral or civic soundness of volunteer activity/activities you have organized or participated in aimed at helping their city, county or state.
- L. Construct morally sound argument defending or opposing some perennial or contemporary moral or civic issue in essay format using either APA, MLA, or CHICAGO formats consistent with ACRL Standards 1, 2, 3, 4, & 5

Course Administration: Grading:

(1) Your final grade will be determined as follows:

20% - Quizzes and Take-Home Assignments

20% - Midterm Exam 20% Multiple Choice Qns.

10% - CLA-Style Performance Task Essay

20% - End of Term Paper with instructions for argumentative essays and for avoiding plagiarism

30% - Final Exam 30 Multiple Choice Qns. (non-comprehensive)

X-tra 10% max for Class Debates/Power point Presentations/Virtual Justice Project participation and brief summaries, Contribution to online discussion boards at Course Blackboard site etc.

To assess the impact or learning outcome of the Information Literacy integrated into the course I used three instruments:

I: Pre& post test set by IL

II: College Learning Assessment (CLA)

III: Term Paper: 4-5 pages Argumentative Essay with Endnotes/References or Bibliography

IMPACT OF INFORMATION LITERACY ON STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME

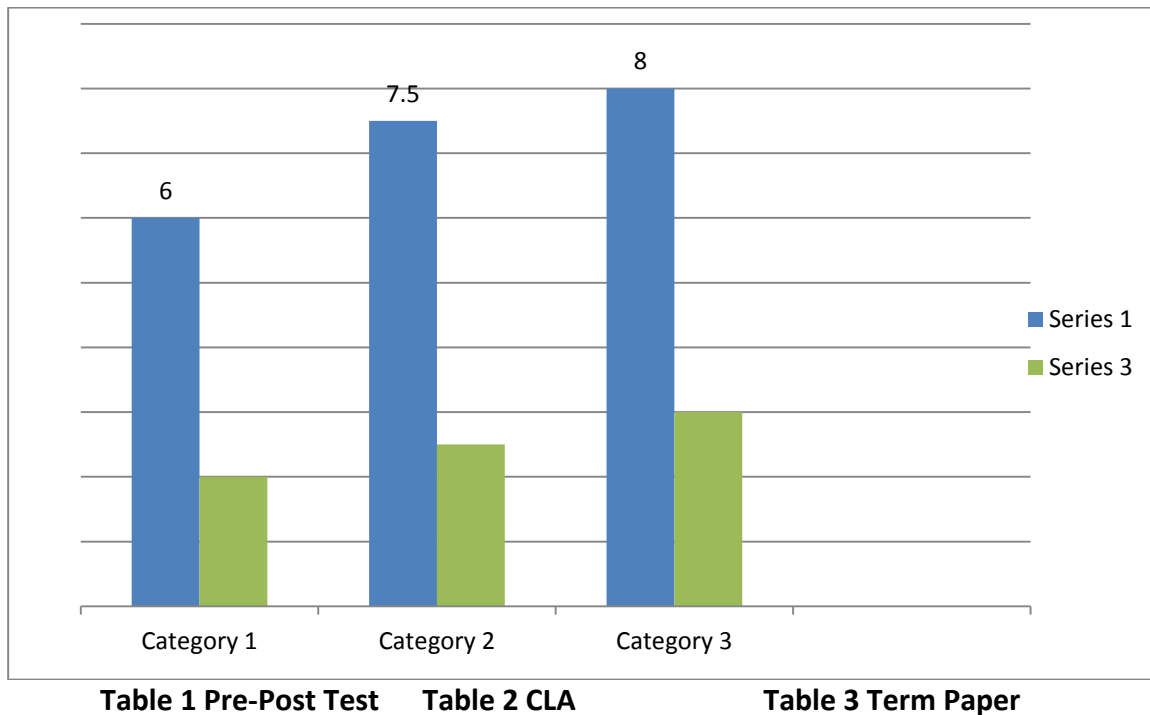


Table 1 Pre-post Test

Blue: Students had higher scores after post-test (11) approx. to 12 ; scaled 50% down
Green for students who scored lower after post test.(3)

Table 2 CLA

Blue: Students meeting or exceeding Expectation: 15 scaled 50% down
Green: Students not meeting expectation (4)

Table 3Term Paper

Blue: Students using citations: 16; scaled 50% down
Green: Students using no citations: 4

PRE& POST TEST OUTCOME ANALYSIS IN DETAIL

	STUDENT	Pre-Test	%	Post-Test	%
1	I. G.	13	65%	17	85%
2	Q. M	12	60%	18	90%
3	B W	16	80%	17	85%
4	A T Q	15	75%	18	90%
5	MS	16	80%	18	90%
6	A W	19	95%	17	85%
7	W P	13	65%	12	60%
8	T H	09	45%	12	60%
9	S L	10	59%	14	70%
10	J. A.	15	75%	14	70%
11	S R	17	85%	19	95%
12	R W T	19	95%	20	100%
13	S D	15	75%	14	70%
14	E C	14	70%	15	75%
15	N J.	-	-	15	75%
16	A T			18	95%
17	S M	-	-	20	100%

ANALYSIS: A Few Observations worth Noting:

1. Most students demonstrated a clear gain from pre-test to post-test suggesting the impact of the Introductory Lecture by our IL library partner Ms. Evelyn Council.
2. The most notable gain came from Student No. 2, QM, who moved from 60% to 90%; followed by Student#1 I. G. who moved from 65 to 85% and No. 10, SL who moved from 59% to 70%
3. As in many if not most multiple choice questions luck plays a significant part when students don't know the correct answers but make a guess. That might explain why in a

few instances some students did worse in their post test than in their pre-test scores. The Examples include Student no. 6 and no. 10

2ND Instrument CLA Performance Test

PHIL 120: Moral Principles & Contemporary Moral Problems

CLA Performance Task or Essay: The essay will be written in class. Clarity of expression, good grammar, logical organization, and comprehensive explanation are important aspects of your essay. The grade for the essay will be rubric-based.

In this essay, you should make sure you understand the questions you are asked and base your answers to them on the documents you will be provided. Write clearly and grammatically; make sure your essay is well-organized. Focusing on relevant information and providing support from the documents is crucial. You should comprehensively consider the evidence presented and draw explicit conclusions as well. Two weeks before the essay the class will hold a lab session to answer CLA-Style Performance questions. They will then be given CLA-Style Performance Documents and questions to answer for practice using *CLA Rubric for emerging, developing and mastery or mature levels*.

After grading their sample essays they will be given feedback in class on improving clarity, use of evidence, recognition of fallacies, inconsistencies, contradictions, and ambiguities as well as feedback on how to do proofreading using word processor tools or Smart-Thinking at their Blackboard site or in the FSU Writing Lab. Additionally, Model CLA Essays will also be posted on line for students to review prior to the CLA exam day.

Report on CLA:

The CLA short for College Learning Assessment has become a highly respected nationwide instrument for College assessment. It is a welcome alternative to the multiple choices which tends to promote rote learning or memorization without understanding. To pass on this test students must not only read selected documents, but also analyze them for clarity, relevance, credibility and logical correctness and fallacies. In some cases students must interpret graphs and proceed with quantitative and qualitative analyses to detect patterns and correlations that might not represent causal relations. Credit is given for ability to evaluate any statements and arguments and the explanations for why they are false, questionable, irrelevant, or insufficient for a given conclusion.

Evidently, CLA is not only consistent with the aims and objectives of Information Literacy but might be one of the best instruments for cultivating the IL habit in students and in preparing them for future carriers as well as their own personal or family lives.

Analysis of CLA Performance Test

No. of students who took CLA test: 20

Meet or Exceed Expectation (scoring 14/20 or better): 15/20 or 75%

Not Meet Expectation (scoring 13 or less): 5/20 or 25%

Great improvement over similar CLA tests in previous Courses including Critical Thinking:

Explanation: The difference is most likely due to their heightened awareness

3RD INSTRUMENT: TERM PAPER

SPRING 2014 DEPT OF PHIL/GOV/HIST@ FSU/UNC [DR. J. OSEI] PHIL 120; MORAL PRINCIPLES AND CONTEMPORARY MORAL ISSUES

Choose any 1 of the 3 Essay Qns below and answer it using the
Guidelines and Directives below.

***DIRECTIVES:** Follow the 5 steps for writing Argumentative Essays:*

***A: Introduction** [2pts]*

***B. Thesis or Objective.** (Thesis = Main claim or conclusion); you can also state it in terms of an Objective to be achieved in the paper or both) [4pts]*

***C. Main Body of the Essay.** (Devote 1 or 2 paragraphs to each main point with supporting evidence and illustrations or examples etc.) [8pts]*

***D. Discussion** of actual or hypothetical questions and your response. [4pts]*

***E. Conclusion** (Summary, highlight of main points, lessons learned for now or the future. Etc; but no new topic or issues not treated in the theme) [2pts]*

NB: FSU Writing Center can help you write an outline for your topic and edit it for you. Ask them about how to use FSU Turn –IT-IN program

Q1. In the light of the allegations of racism in the US judicial system, should Capital Punishment be abolished in the US?

Q2. Discuss the views or philosophical arguments for and against torture including the views of Utilitarians and Kantians, and indicate who has the better or the best argument and why.

Q3. Many people think that now that we have a Black President and a Black Family in the White House, Affirmative Action for Blacks is no longer necessary. Show why you agree or disagree with the criticism on moral or legal grounds.

Length: 3-4 pages plus end notes or bibliography in line with APA, MLA or Chicago formats, depending on your major or minor. **Refer to the Handout from the library Workshop at the beginning of the term.**

NB: No matter which question you choose be sure to incorporate or include some of the definitions, moral theories and principles as well as legal cases, arguments, and expert views from our text book, *citing page numbers and references.

Due Date: Tue. Friday Marc 5 2015 2:00pm

NB: Remember, plagiarism is not only immoral it is also illegal. Acknowledge all sources, especially, when you use the exact words of an author for two or more lines.

Report on Student Essays:

The total number of students who submitted their essays was 20/22.

Of these 16 students used bibliography or end notes or some form of citation.

No. of students who did not use any form of citation or bibliography: 4/20

Compared with previous terms in Moral philosophy and Critical Thinking there is a marked improvement. It is not unusual to find up to 30% of students not using any citation at all despite repeated announcements and threats of losing 2/20 or 10% points.

Plan for Improvement:

In addition to introducing my next Phil 120 students to IT and especially the ACTL formula, I plan to increase the penalty for no citations or bibliography from 2 points (10%) to 4 points (20%)

This, I believe, will not be a fool-proof solution, but will make it more likely than not that more students in my next class, being rational and motivated by predominant egoism or self interest, will try to avoid the 4 point or 25% penalty and include citations in their term papers.

Closing Remarks:

Before I take my seat please join me in showing my appreciation to Ms Evelyn Council for all her counseling and support. I'm also grateful to the Director and the entire library staff for their support in organizing these workshops so we could be more effective in our classrooms.

Thanks!

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