Library Instruction in NO TIME!

Presented by Amy Trendler

Case Studies IV, VRA + ARLIS/NA Conference 2011, Minneapolis, MN
Librarians and visual resources curators don’t always get a lot of time in the classroom, but every time we talk to a class it is an opportunity. I will be using examples from two classes I visit regularly: the first year studio in the College of Architecture and Planning’s common first year program (25 min. with 100 students in lecture hall and 20 min. with sections of 15 students for a library tour) and the thesis research classes (30-50 min. in classroom with 10-20 students).
It is easy to make the mistake of trying to cover everything about the library in a short class visit, but keep in mind that students usually won’t retain much of this information even if there is an assignment related to your session. For the first year class visit I initially covered a lot of ground, but there aren’t many research assignments during this year and my approach wasn’t working very well. I’ve pared back what I cover and refocused on fewer goals for these instruction sessions.
For the first year class, my goal is simply to let them know that the library has lots of resources related to their assignments, interests, and field. To me this is important because new students have little to no experience with a specialized library and often don’t know what they’ll find in the library or even what is being published in their field.

For the thesis classes, my goal is to let them know that the library has many resources and services related to their thesis topics and that they can talk to me or email me with questions about their research.
Regardless of the other goals of a session, I think it is always important for us to demonstrate how relevant the library resources or visual resources collection are to students’ classes/assignments/fields. Show them why they should be searching the online catalog or databases rather than getting too caught up in showing them how to find items. Examples: for the first year class I show a timed PPT “video” of new book covers, periodical covers, images from the collection, and archival materials; for the thesis classes I have begun devoting more time to passing around examples of journals from their discipline and new books.
It’s o.k. to try and teach them something such as finding an article, using the LibGuide or library website, or using other library resources, but I don’t make this the ultimate goal of the session.

Examples: for the first year class, I will briefly demonstrate finding books, articles, and images; for the grad classes I briefly demonstrate advanced feature of finding books, articles, etc. as well as using services like interlibrary loan.
The ultimate goal is to give students a positive idea about what the library has to offer them and motivate them to make use of library resources. We should keep in mind that at some point we need to take a step back and let students do what they can with our online catalogs and databases; showing them step-by-step and in great detail how to use these resources may not be the best use of limited time in the classroom.
Create easy to understand tools for students to use when they do pursue library research. These may be paper handouts, LibGuides, web sites, or a combination.

Examples: I have a LibGuide specifically for students in the first year program; for the thesis research classes I created a “thesis research checklist” paper handout.
The point of all of these efforts: get students in the library or visual resources collection (or to your web site) and using the resources and collections. Example: in the first year class I conduct two short exercises during their library tour by passing out copies of online catalog records for books and article citations. Students must find the book and then the article, which have all been carefully chosen so that they are interesting and current. Both exercises give students a small success in finding items, a chance to see that the librarian is approachable as I walk around helping them, and time to flip through an interesting book or article.
Any class visit, even 15 minutes, is an opportunity to promote the library or visual resources collection. When designing a short instruction session consider focusing on broader goals and giving students a positive impression of the library or visual resources collection.
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- Focus
- Dazzle them.
- Teach them something.
- Make it fun.
- Provide tools.
- Encourage them to come to the library.

Designing a Short Instruction Session

- Crash Session:
- The Goal:
- The Lesson:
- The Fun Part:
- What's encouraging about it?

The worksheet from the breakout session:

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Case Studies IV: "Library Instruction in No Time," presented by Amy Trendler
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