

Enhancing Student Research Skills Information Literacy Stipends for 2020

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Name of Library Faculty Collaborator	Donna Witek

Course and Research Assignment Background

Theology II is a required course, and an Introduction to Christian Theology. This means that students who enroll in the course may have no interest in theology in general or in Christian theology in particular. Yet, Theology II does have Theology I as prerequisite, so students should have some Biblical aptitude. So I have designed the course to prioritize hands-on self-discovery with an initial shallow learning curve. While I scheduled "Information Literacy Week" (more information below) in the fourth week of the semester, the very first day of class mentioned the research paper and the topic of Information Literacy (IL). Before the second week of class even started, I announced the coming "Information Literacy Week," and I urged students to begin researching their choices for secondary sources for the research paper. The research paper was not due until the last week of the semester, so all research truly contextualized the work of the entire semester. Aside from "Information Literacy Week," the saturation reached its second peak by Week 10, in which the first of three consecutive, weekly research installments for the research paper became due. These installments, which as a group are worth just as much to the semester grade as the paper itself, are a low

Prof. Witek on the specific IL needs of Theology II. Furthermore, IL standards had changed since my previous IL project, so I needed to update my course material with the new standards.

Information Literacy Standards That Are Addressed

Information Literacy applies to the two research angles in my class: Biblical research and theological assimilation. Each of these angles demands a different primary frame for the work of Information Literacy for Higher Education

One way that students learn to identify and analyze these themes and texts of Christian life and thought is through a series of research assignments culminating in a research paper. Nearly every assignment semester not only presents theological data but also specifically expose the students to the thought world of the writer, from the persona of King Solomon to Rabbi Apostle Paul, from Athanasius to Martin Luther, from Charlotte Mary Yonge to John Behr, and from John Ruskin to G. K. Chesterton and C. S. Lewis. With the university educational ideal of transformation in mind, students consider dynamics within and outside the authors and contemplate the contexts of individual or corporate transformation.

In Week 4 of the semester, Library Professor Donna Witek and I formally presented what had been latent all along: Acquiring data and evaluating the dynamic relationship of data to the environment of scholarly conversation, two fundamental aspects of both biblical and theological research. In this “Information Literacy Week,” we thus explained the deductive foundation for the inductive discoveries we had been targeting from the beginning. In my lecture material, I surveyed the Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education both in general and as it relates to theology research. In her lecture, Witek then explained to the students how to use information resources both to improve the quality of their Bible studies and to improve their evaluation of theological sources. “Information Literacy Week” was thus the formal kickoff for students to begin work on their research papers. Their research paper, due late in the semester but built upon a series of weekly graded installments, is a guided excursion between secondary sources (both curated and discovered through independent research), course reading and lecture resources, relevant Biblical texts, and theological themes and methods covered in the course. By researching for this paper, students learn for themselves to isolate theological themes and see how they are presented and developed in the various primary and secondary sources. The research component helps students to use secondary sources to improve the accuracy of their understanding of biblical passages (FR1pd3), draw conclusions for themselves about the development of these Biblical themes (FR1pd2), evaluate a secondary theological source (FSCpd2) for its situatedness (FSCpd1, 4), or correct their initial, mistaken understandings of the theological concept (FR1pd1, 6) and tell the story of their own research progression (FR1pd1).

Approach to Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

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also both the character of the author and the reception of the text. In this “best paper” student researched demonstrated a prolonged investigation into both of these features of the secondary source. This success I directly attribute to the “Information Literacy Week.” Second, even though making general characterizations is weak, I believe I can conclude that overall student research papers were characterized as having lively interactions with their secondary and primary sources. Such interactions would be the expected result of the research emphases that Prof. Witek and I emphasized. I would characterize these interactions as not merely looking at a source as a repository of quotes by which to patch together a formally acceptable research paper. Instead, I contend that my students’ use of their sources demonstrates that they recognize their sources to be full statements by an author about topics or situations. I conten7(c)-1om

- The weekly installments helped in organizing thoughts and points for the major paper. The concept map which was created by Professor Witek helped with gathering and finding relevant information.
- I learned many things for theology class and my paper, but one important tool is learning how to navigate through the library and knowing all the resources offered to me. I believe this is most important because I can use this skill in all future classes. I am very comfortable and able to reach out to the librarians for research help, which I was not previously aware of. I became informed with many topics for my theology major paper and I am thankful for that, but I am most glad that I know I have more assistance in the library for future reference!
- One major perspective I earned from Information Literacy Week this semester is that it is okay not to have an answer for everything in research, for finding good questions can be as important as finding answers.

This sampling, actually lifted directly out of the middle of the D2L answers list, shows the breadth of IL targeted gains this semester, from basic IL resources, to research strategy, to Prof. Witek's chart, to IL relevance beyond Theology. This breadth, unsolicited and undirected, shows that the IL saturation of this class as intended and expected had a broad and successful footprint.

[Ideas for Continued Enhancement of Information Literacy](#)

As I have reread the IL Framework materials that I have tailored to this class, and as I think about where the rubber meets the road of research possibilities...