It Doesn’t Have to be a Murky Middle: University Faculty Perceptions of Information Literacy Needs in the Sophomore and Junior Years

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Purpose
The purpose of this research study is to assess Belk Library’s instruction and liaison outreach to sophomore and junior level courses and use the assessment to create deeper engagement within particular courses considered to be “in the middle” of a student’s major requirements.

Study Timeline
Co-investigators met with library dean and university assistant director of assessment to discuss study
Liaison librarians selected appropriate middle-level courses within their disciplines and identified instructors in these courses
Two faculty focus groups were held in spring 2019
Focus group recordings were transcribed using Descript in summer 2019
A team of librarians used content analysis to code the transcripts and identify common themes

Methods
Single moderator for both focus groups
Participants were asked semi-structured interview questions
Two digital recorders were used for each focus group
Five faculty in each focus group
ACC, DTS, ENG, ENT, PSY in first group
DTS, EDU, ENG, PSY, WLC in second group
A co-investigator observed each focus group but did not participate

Faculty Observed Student Behavior
Do not read critically or are cursory readers
Lack motivation and may not read at all
Look for an “easy” way to complete assignments
Struggle with locating, interpreting, and summarizing sources
“Tell me the answer” and “Just give me the source”

Focus Group Questions
- What do you consider a mid-level course in your discipline?
- Does your mid-level course work utilize library resources?
- What level of research skills or knowledge do you expect your mid-level students to have?
- Where do you think your students are getting this knowledge or where have you observed your students getting this knowledge?
- How does your discipline define information literacy?
- What is the biggest information literacy deficiency that you have observed in your mid-level students?
- As you consider these deficiencies, how would you envision partnering with your liaison librarian to better address your students’ research needs?
- Are there mid-level courses in your discipline that would benefit from collaboration between the liaison librarian and the teaching faculty?

Common Themes Across Focus Groups
- Students are focused on research as a product, not a process
- Definition of efficiency for faculty and librarians is not the same for students
- Students are unable to distinguish between types of sources or evaluate their quality
- Students are aware of library resources but time constraints may prevent them from engaging with the library resources so they use Google instead
- When faculty discuss collaborations and partnerships with librarians, there is a gap in understanding what librarians do

Future Directions for Our Research
- Conduct a faculty focus group selected from the natural and social sciences
- Conduct a faculty focus group from our undergraduate professional schools: business, communications, and education
- Analyze transcripts from spring 2019, fall 2019, and spring 2020 to identify common themes across all
- Creation of new liaison collaborations with faculty teaching “in the middle” courses

References