

Instructional Partnerships: Team Teaching Global Politics and the Web:¹

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Introduction

Since its beginnings in the 1960s, the bibliographic instruction program at Earlham College has facilitated strong instructional partnerships between teaching faculty and librarians. Given the growth in information sources available via the Internet, these partnerships now extend beyond the realm of traditional library instruction. One example of how this has evolved at Earlham is the two-year partnership of these authors, who have been part of a team that teaches political science students to create World Wide Web (WWW) pages reflecting topical research and analysis. Successful instructional partnerships are critical to the success of this endeavor.

This article describes and evaluates how an assignment that uses the WWW to research and present a global problem was team-taught during the spring 1997 semester, paying particular attention to the instructional partnerships, and their advantages and problems. Reasons for the success of the team teaching methods are discussed.

The Assignment and Its Context

The assignment is given in "Politics 17, the Politics of Global Problems," an introductory course that counts toward general education distribution or the political science major. This course has been part of the Earlham curriculum for nearly twenty years, and has always required that students research and analyze a current international problem. The course is quite popular, especially among first-year students, and tends to have large attendance by Earlham standards. Currently, enrollment is capped at forty.

In the past two years, the assignment has required students to form small groups around particular global problems such as environmental decline, ethnic conflict, or population issues. Using library and Internet resources, the groups research the issue and analyze the response of international organizations. The students then create a WWW page to present their findings.

Several people are involved in teaching this ambitious, semester-long assignment. Politics 17 is taught by Associate Professor of Politics B. Wellington Hall, who also designed the assignment.² The authors of this article, Francesca Lane Rasmus and Christine M. Larson, worked together to provide bibliographic instruction for traditional print and electronic resources, as well as technical instruction. Others involved in teaching this assignment include a member of the academic computing staff, another librarian, and a student assistant.

Teaching the Assignment

The assignment was introduced to the class early in the semester by Professor Hall, who then helped the students form small groups around particular topics. Students also purchased a workbook put together by Professor Hall that contains scholarly articles on information technology and global issues, as well as several computer exercises to help them create Webpages. The librarians worked with students primarily during four eighty-minute computer lab sessions, held approximately once per month during the course of the semester.

In the first lab session the authors provided bibliographic instruction on library search strategy and traditional resources such as encyclopedias, periodical indexes, and the library catalog. We also covered evaluation of Websites, Web search engines, and the citation of WWW resources.³ We then introduced Eudora e-mail software and the Netscape WWW browser, taught the students how to download each of these programs from the college server, and covered the basics of using them.

To reinforce the objectives of this first lab session, we asked the students to find a Website, to bookmark it in Netscape, and to write a brief review of the site. They were to evaluate the site in a couple of paragraphs using the five criteria covered in the bibliographic instruction: accuracy, authority, objectivity, currency, and coverage. The students then sent their evaluations, along with the URL (Uniform Resource Locator) of the site, in an e-mail message to Professor Hall.

In the next two lab sessions, the librarians and the professor worked together teaching the class. The second lab session was devoted to teaching HTML (Hypertext Markup Language). Using *SimpleText*, an easy-to-use Macintosh text editor available on the lab computers, students typed out a sample HTML document and learned how to view it through Netscape. Once finished with the sample HTML document, they sent a copy to their professor as an attached document to an e-mail message. In the third lab session several weeks later, the student groups were instructed in the use of FTP (File Transfer Protocol), and practiced transferring their HTML documents to the college's Web server.

During the final lab session, each group presented its WWW project to the entire class. The students' sites usually include a summary and analysis of their topics derived from their own research, as well as graphics, maps, links to other Web sites and documents, acknowledgments, and bibliographies. It is exciting for all of us — the professor, the librarians, and the students — to see our hard work result in quality Webpages that are available to anyone via the Internet. These student projects for the Spring 1997 semester can be viewed at <http://www.earlham.edu/www/polisci/SSem97.html>. Projects from other semesters are located at: <http://www.earlham.edu/www/polisci/polindex.html>.

Evaluation of the Assignment

Having first-year undergraduates present research and analysis via a WWW page may seem like an unusual and ambitious assignment. How well does it work as a teaching tool? After having taught this assignment for three semesters, we have noted a few advantages and disadvantages.

Among the advantages to this assignment is the students' level of motivation. While undergraduates may be bored by, or resistant to, writing a traditional research paper, they are excited about learning to research and create resources on the Web. Over the two years this assignment has been given, we have noticed student attitudes toward learning HTML change considerably. The first time it was taught, students were often resistant to and worried about the technology. Now, students are excited by it. Most come to the assignment with a positive attitude, previous experience, and an eagerness to create Web pages.

Another important advantage in integrating Web use into this particular course is that the students are using and creating a resource that is integral to their research in two distinct ways. First, one of the objectives of the

course is to examine the impact of emerging information technologies on international relations. Second, the assignment requires students to analyze the work of international organizations in dealing with specific world problems. It is necessary that they use the Web to do so, because a small library like ours cannot maintain a comprehensive collection of current and primary resources for all non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the United Nations, and other international organizations. Given that many of these publications are now available on the Internet, the WWW is not only relevant, but is sometimes the best source of current information by or about these organizations.

Students also find great satisfaction in creating a project that is available as a resource for others in the class, and, indeed, the entire online world. In one case, a group of students received e-mail feedback from someone in New Zealand who had found their pages valuable. What is more, the students can use their new information technology skills in other courses and projects.

Of course, in beginning to integrate new technologies into a course, we have had a few problems. Given their enthusiasm for learning HTML, it is no surprise that students would sometimes emphasize technology and Webpage design over content and analysis. Students were also inclined to begin or restrict their research to the WWW, even though the bibliographic instruction noted the value and importance of beginning with print resources. We believe this problem was exacerbated by our attempts to cover too much material in the first lab session. Next time, we will give the bibliographic instruction and the instruction on Eudora and Netscape in separate sessions, making both better learning experiences.

The Instructional Partnerships

There have been several advantages to team teaching this particular assignment. A rather obvious one is that each member of the teaching team, and the students, can benefit from the expertise and skill of each teacher. This has been especially important in this assignment, as it makes highly integrated use of print and electronic information, research skills, analysis, and technological competencies.

We have also found it useful for students, especially first-years students, to develop a working rapport with several resource people. Over the course of the semester, the students learn from the professor, the librarians, the student teaching assistant, and their peers in the research groups. Stu-

dents are more likely to consult one of us, in or out of the classroom, and varying learning styles and needs are more likely to be met.

With several teachers involved, it is possible to swap teaching roles when necessary. For example, when Professor Hall was ill one day, the librarians were able to teach the first eighty-minute lab session alone on just a few hours notice.

The only drawback we experienced in team teaching was that the coordination of several teachers takes a lot of planning and organization, which sometimes breaks down. This happened only once, however, when a computing staff member created a worksheet on a revised lab procedure, but had since lost the original computer file.

Conclusion

Why has this instructional partnership worked so well? Several factors have contributed to our success. First and foremost, Professor Hall has a history of giving innovative research assignments, and of involving librarians in providing instruction for these. She has also worked hard to coordinate all the teachers involved. Second, the librarians have been willing to teach and work outside our usual roles. In addition to providing bibliographic instruction and reference support, we have taught and answered questions about Eudora, FTP, Netscape, and HTML. These two factors have enabled further development of the mutual trust between the professor and librarians that has its basis in Earlham's course-integrated bibliographic instruction program.

Most importantly, the continuity of our instructional partnerships over several semesters has been extremely valuable. It has facilitated development of the assignment in response to rapidly changing technologies. The ongoing partnerships allow the Politics of Global Problems assignment and the methods of teaching it to evolve through diverse input and feedback.

End Notes

1. This article is an adaptation from a presentation given at the Indiana Library Federation 1997 Annual Conference, April 30-May 2, in Indianapolis, Indiana. An outline of the presentation and accompanying material is available at <http://www.earlham.edu/www/library/ILF/ilfpage1.htm>.

2. For more information about the course or assignment, contact Professor Hall via e-mail at: wellingh@earlham.edu.

3. An HTML copy of the bibliographic instruction handout is available at <http://www.earlham.edu/www.library/ilf/pol17.htm>; a PDF version requiring Adobe's Acrobat Reader is at: <http://www.earlham.edu/www.library/ilf/pol17.pdf>