Voices of Community  
Database Searching Workshop  
Spring 2010  
Assessment Summary

Assessment Method
Students in 9 Voices of Community classes were given instruction on how to search a periodical database to retrieve articles. Following the instruction students were given a series of 12 questions to complete. These questions required the use of a periodical database and provided students with practice searching a database using different search methods, experience finding specific pieces of information, and reading the information presented in a database record.

Goals of the Exercise
- Learn effective methods for searching a periodical database
- Understand the difference between different search options
- Identify elements of a database record including subject headings, citation information, and availability of full-text
- Identify methods to limit search results

Skill 1: Search a periodical database using a specified search term and function
Question 1: Do a title search for the article “Information Inaccuracy”
114 out of 114 (100%) students answered this question accurately

Skill 2: Identify subject terms
Question 2: What are the subject terms for this article?
103 students (90%) answered this question accurately
10 (9%) students answered this question inaccurately
1 (1%) student did not answer this question

Skill 3: Find specific information in an article
Question 3: This article discusses the reported death of which 2 United States Senators?
113 students (99%) answered this question accurately
1 student (1%) answered this question inaccurately

Question 4: At what event did the reported deaths supposedly occur?
112 students (98%) answered this question accurately
2 students (2%) answered this question inaccurately

Question 5: What resource reported these deaths?
107 students (94%) answered this question accurately
6 students (5%) answered this question inaccurately
1 student (1%) did not answer this question
Skill 4: Search a periodical database to find a specific piece of information. Construct the database search using own search terms and search functions.
Question 6: Find an article that verifies the death of one of the senators.
93 students (82%) answered this question accurately
11 (9%) students answered this question inaccurately
11 students (9%) did not answer this question

Question 9: Find an article that identifies this milestone....
51 (45%) answered this question accurately
14 students (12%) answered this question inaccurately
49 students (43%) did not answer this question

Question 10: The other senator recently passed a milestone. What was the milestone?
68 students (60%) answered this question accurately
4 students (4%) answered this question inaccurately
42 students (36%) did not answer this question

Skill 5: Select effective search terms and search functions
Question 7: How did you find this article? What search function and term(s) did you use?
A. Identify search terms:
86 students (76%) answered this question accurately
14 students (12%) answered this question inaccurately
14 students (12%) did not answer this question

B. Identify search functions:
55 students (48%) answered this question accurately
34 students (30%) answered this question inaccurately
14 students (12%) did not answer this question

Question 11: How did you find this article? What search function and term(s) did you use?
A. Identify appropriate search terms
52 students (46%) answered this question accurately
3 students (2%) answered this question inaccurately
59 students (52%) did not answer this question

B. Identify search function
27 students (23%) answered this question accurately
28 students (25%) answered this question inaccurately
59 students (52%) did not answer this question

Skill 6: Identify elements of a citation
Question 6: Provide article title, periodical title, and publication date.
68 students (60%) answered this question accurately by providing a complete citation
24 students (21%) partially answered this question accurately by providing an incomplete citation
12 students (11%) provided incorrect citations
10 students (8%) did not answer this question

Question 9: Provide article title, periodical title, and publication date
33 students (29%) answered this question accurately by providing a complete citation
21 students (18%) partially answered this question accurately by providing an incomplete citation
2 students (2%) provided an incorrect citation
58 students (51%) did not answer this question

Skill 7: Limit search results to articles from academic journals

Question 8: ...limit your search results to academic journals. How many articles are retrieved?
43 students (38%) answered this question accurately
53 students (47%) answered this question inaccurately
17 students (15%) did not answer this question

Skill 8: Identify full-text articles

Question 12: Is this article available full-text?
48 students (42%) answered this question accurately
7 students (6%) answered this question inaccurately
59 students (52%) did not answer this question

Observations
Some students had more time to complete the questions than other students. Some questions that were not answered may have been a result of a lack of time. However, it is difficult to conclude whether or not questions that went unanswered were due to time constraints or if students could not identify an answer to the question.

Conclusions
Through these questions students demonstrated basic knowledge and skill in finding articles within a database. When students were given a specific article to find, the success rate was 100%. Success was also high, but to a lesser extent, when students were asked to find an article and develop their own search strategy to accomplish this task. Students also showed skills in finding information within articles. The three different questions that asked for information from an article all had at least 94% accuracy. Though students were able to find articles, when asked how they searched for these articles students had some difficulty relating the search terms and methods used. Many students selected effective search terms but the majority of students could not identify the search method used. Students struggled with placing limits on search results. Questions asking students to limit searches to full-text and academic journal articles resulted in the majority of students not completing these tasks or completing them incorrectly.
Association of College and Research Libraries Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education outcomes achieved through this workshop

2.1.c Investigates the scope, content, and organization of information retrieval systems
2.1.d. Selects efficient and effective approaches for accessing the information needed from the investigative method or information retrieval system
2.2.b. Identifies keywords, synonyms and related terms for the information needed
2.2.c. Selects controlled vocabulary specific to the discipline or information retrieval source
2.2.d. Constructs a search strategy using appropriate commands for the information retrieval system selected (e.g., Boolean operators, truncation, and proximity for search engines; internal organizers such as indexes for books)
2.4.b. Identifies gaps in the information retrieved and determines if the search strategy should be revised
2.4.c. Repeats the search using the revised strategy as necessary
3.1.a Reads the text and selects main ideas
3.4.a. Determines whether information satisfies the research or other information need
3.7.a. Determines if original information need has been satisfied or if additional information is needed
3.7.b. Reviews search strategy and incorporates concepts as necessary