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Video Instruction Made to Order:  
Collaboration between Librarians and Faculty to Improve Student Theses

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### Abstract

This paper traces the collaboration between the librarians in my special library and two academic departments in my university. Our initial discussions led to a deeper understanding of our mutual goals: helping students acquire the research and writing skills they would need to write their master's theses, and their continued engagement in scholarship as future professionals, as consumers, and as producers of new knowledge in their field. The librarians offered a unique solution: a series of fifteen videos that showed, among other topics, how to search the academic databases across disciplines, how to target research and organize the results, and how to design a research and publishing agenda. The department chairs were essential to the success of this project, offering feedback during the creation process, both for language specific to their academic field and for content. Some of the videos have been used by other faculty as demonstrations of fundamental skill sets deemed necessary for all college students. All fifteen videos are available to the public through the university online catalog.

### Changing Role of Librarians

The role of a librarian has changed since the black-and-white television days of the 1950s, when Ozzie and Harriet's boys would go to the school library and quietly check out books under the watchful eye of the lady librarian. The boys have grown up and the landscape of knowledge has been catapulted into the electronic era (Doiron & Asselin, 2011). Even the library has changed: my university library is a multifunctional place designed to accommodate

academic hermits, group projects, social exchanges, and a Starbucks coffee shop. The central library houses not just print material but also electronic files and computers to access them, classrooms for librarians to teach in, and presentation practice rooms (Hunter & Ward, 2011),(Medeiros, 2011).

Today's academic librarians are intimately involved in student learning. As a faculty librarian at the University of South Florida, it is my role to introduce undergraduates to the vast array of library resources and help them become efficient and self-sufficient researchers (Healy, 2010)(Hide, 2010),(Kaur & Sharda, 2010). Corinne Nyquist (2010) states simply, "The mission of libraries and librarians is to serve the information needs of our patrons." My role extends to graduate students, post-graduate students, and faculty who need assistance updating their their electronic skills or help finding materials for their own research papers. Research courses are now sometimes viewed as having two components: the academic component that is the domain of the professor, and the library component, i.e., learning how to use the library resources essential for a particular field of study, and that material is often taught by a librarian who may be embedded in the course(Homan, 2010),(Mavodza, 2011).

Successful college graduates must know how to find information and determine whether it is valid and trustworthy. They will be able to evaluate what they read, synthesize the major findings of their research, and then critically review those findings in light of competing theories. Given the wide variety and expanding number of sources available to students, this is not an easy task (O'Connor & Wong, 2010). They must also be able to write their thoughts coherently in a prescribed format and citation style, and express themselves in their own words. Librarians are often called upon to assist in all of these phases of academic education.

## Collaboration

In 2009, Ardis Hanson, then-Director of my library and I were approached with a particular concern by two faculty chairs in the College of Community and Behavioral Sciences at the University of South Florida-Tampa: their masters students were not putting out the quality of theses expected for the level of research and writing deemed essential for the Applied Behavior Analysis Graduate Program and the Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling Graduate Program. As librarians in the Florida Mental Health Institute Research Library, a special library within the USF Libraries, we were intimately aware of the resources the students needed to use, their coursework, and the goals of these two programs.

As the director of the library and senior librarian, Ardis Hanson worked with the two department chairs to clarify the courses which would most benefit from a skills-building project. Her preliminary work was essential in identifying the larger framework for the project and shaping the intervention. Her work is represented in the following three paragraphs, largely unedited.

The thesis course (MHS 6971) in the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) program was one of the target courses. In this course, the graduate students are prepared to research, write, conduct, and defend their thesis. In a transdisciplinary field, such as applied behavior analysis, the use of conceptual models to map and guide research facilitates the systematization of knowledge. The 46-credit-hour master's degree in ABA is interdisciplinary. It provides coursework and practical supervision across three academic units (College of Arts and Sciences, College of Education, and the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute). This interdisciplinary program links existing courses, as well as new courses, to create a comprehensive and cohesive degree program. Students are required to show proficiency in

courses that constitute a core curriculum, demonstrate content areas through supervised practicum experiences, and complete a thesis. The master's degree program was designed to prepare students to meet the standards to be Board Certified Behavior Analysts. The degree was intended to assist in their preparation for employment in fields such as developmental services, education, child protective services, rehabilitation, and mental health, where there are growing demands for competent professionals with expertise in applied behavior analysis.

The Master's program in Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling was the second venue that was selected for a skills intervention. Two courses with immediate application are Research and Program Evaluation (RCS 6740) and the graduate seminar course (RCS 6930). The Department of Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling emphasizes psychological, social, medical, and vocational aspects of disability and the development and refinement of personal adjustment counseling skills. Students come from a full range of disciplines and related programs to pursue licensure by the Florida Department of Health Board of Clinical Social Work, Marriage and Family Therapy, and Mental Health Counseling.

#### Parameters

The fundamental description of Applied Behavior Analysis was defined in the 1968 article by Baer, Wolf, and Risley (Baer & Wolf, 1968). It focuses on application, behavior, the use of analysis, and a technological, conceptually systematic approach. Applying this same focus to information-seeking behavior, we envisioned a set of tutorials that would be useful across disciplines and content delivery modalities. Mirroring the ABA approach, we agreed to create a series of instructional videos incorporating the use of library and networked technologies for these two departments. Not only would this project address departmental and college

requirements regarding field of knowledge, it would address Goal II of the USF *Strategic Plan*, i.e., “demonstrated acquisition of knowledge, communication and critical thinking skills; and competency to synthesize and apply new knowledge” (University of South Florida, 2011).

Video was selected as a medium for knowledge dissemination for several reasons. It would be available to students 24/7. Video offers students the opportunity to learn skills on their own time, at their own pace. There is no stigma attached to watching a video more than once – who’s going to know? Video also relieved the pressure on the librarians to teach students basic research and software skills, and this was important in the era of shrinking budgets. The librarians’ time would be better utilized by working with students after they had basic knowledge provided by the videos. The videos were structured to address specific topics in the thesis courses, in a logical progression from initial idea to final paper. Many of the concepts and skills explained and demonstrated in the videos are transferable to other disciplines, such as Social Work, Special Education, and Psychology. For example, the video on epidemiology addresses a brief definition, identifies epidemiological resources, and walks the student through identified and pertinent online resources. Hence, each video could be a stand-alone resource in other classes also examining epidemiological resources.

The videos were produced using Camtasia software. Each of the videos is captioned to comply with standards required for accessibility by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In addition, the federal government requires accessibility for all federal grant recipients who create web or digital content to meet Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act: Electronic and Information Technology Accessibility Standards (<http://www.access-board.gov/508.htm>). Since the College and USF are the recipients of a number of federal grants, accessibility is essential. Since the videos are captioned, transcripts (.pdf ) are available with the videos. The videos were

funded by the Center for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Teaching Excellence, a unit on campus that promotes the use of technology in the classroom to improve student learning. Funds were used to hire a videographer, purchase the video software and necessary hardware, including two PCs and headphones with microphones. The grant was proposed and awarded for just under \$8000.

### The Video Series

Early in the project, guidelines were determined for video style and voice; timetable; and depth and breadth of information covered. Fifteen topics were chosen, and experience led to a few minor modifications. The final list is as follows:

- A Trans-disciplinary Approach to Searching
- Tips to Conducting a Systematic Review
- Citation Searching in Web of Science
- Finding Tests & Measures
- Keeping Current in the Literature
- Understanding Epidemiology of Disorders
- Creating an Annotated Bibliography
- The IRB as a Dynamic Process
- Finding Empirical & Clinical Research
- Quick Guide to APA Style 6th edition
- Performing Legal Research
- Steps to Completing Your Thesis
- Using Content Management Systems
- Creating a Research Agenda
- Getting Ready to Publish

Hanson took the lead on writing the texts while Dold assumed responsibility for video production, although these roles were blended from time to time. Each video was reviewed by department chairs, librarians, and students before it was made live.

An evaluation program was designed from the outset to determine the impact of the series on student learning by students during the actual thesis/seminar courses. This evaluation program is targeted for implementation in fall semester, 2012. After the student has viewed a video, he or

she will be asked to answer a series of questions. These include but are not limited to perception of skills/knowledge learned, ease of use of resource, and application to course requirements. For example, the question, “Can you apply the concepts/skills demonstrated in this video to your thesis process?” is followed by a binary yes/no, and a text box allows the student to evaluate the usefulness of video X vis-à-vis course/thesis requirements and their current knowledge base of the topic as found in this resource/concept. The summative evaluation will provide an overall benchmark of the videos as a series. Finally, there will be space for reflective comments by both students and faculty as in what might have been different or other personal observations.

### Lessons Learned

While the experience was positive as a learning process and the outcome was a cohesive body of work, it is important to note that there are challenges to producing a video series. Firstly, not all videographers are made equal. Not only is there a great variety in skill sets, but good taste is hard to measure, as is good fit. One young videographer thought a photo of a young man blowing his brains out with a gun was just right as an illustration of frustration. She was unaware the suicide is at epidemic proportions among today’s youth in the United States. The students in the two programs are working toward a career in the helping professions, and they too can be under a lot of stress. Secondly, there seems to be widespread reluctance among students and faculty to view a video. Perhaps they have been subjected to some really bad ones, or perhaps they are reluctant to commit time to an unknown payoff. Injecting a bit of humor into each video makes it memorable and less taxing to the viewer. Thirdly, educational videos must meet specific teaching goals and follow a pedagogy. This project used the Vitollo and Coulston’s model to measure pedagogy, which matches technology with skills. There are also



levels of proficiency in information usage that are important benchmarks in education to consider in creating a video. Fourthly, there are always technical issues. The production software had a glitch that necessitated involving their programming people. Work was lost when the external hard drive failed. Video segments had to be re-shot when the library homepage was updated. None of these situations represents failure; rather, they result from progress in the evolution of human knowledge, craftsmanship, and invention. Lastly, just as video is a change in the vehicle to deliver research and writing skills, so too is the world ahead always changing (Sun, Chen, Tseng, & Tsai, 2011). Content will have to be updated regularly to keep it relevant to the student learning experience. Professors will write new courses, librarians will learn new ways to teach library skills (Bronstein, 2011)(Moradi & Azizi, 2010). New students will benefit from librarians' ongoing efforts to prepare them for a lifetime of learning and their opportunity to contribute to society.

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