

Teaching communication and information literacy skills

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Undergrads often take communication courses unrelated to their major or discipline. The Iowa State University Department of Horticulture teamed up with the Library and English Departments to develop a course section to teach students to research and understand literature searchers and incorporate them into papers and posters.

Andrea L. Dinkelman, Jeanine E. Aune, and Gail R. Nonnecke, Iowa State University faculty from the library and the Departments of English and Horticulture, developed the section in an required undergraduate foundation English communication course. A description of the collaboration was published in the 2010 *Journal of Natural Resources and Life Sciences Education*, published by the American Society of Agronomy, the Crop Science Society of America, and the Soil Science Society of America.

The course section was designed for horticulture majors. Undergraduates often do not see the relevance of required English to their major. Communication and information [literacy skills](#) were taught in the context of Horticulture. The faculty collaboration has been ongoing since spring 2006.

First, the librarian instructs students about how to find and evaluate information sources. During the course of the semester, students complete an annotated bibliography and a research paper. At the end of the semester, the students redesign their research paper into a poster. The horticulture faculty review and provide feedback on the research

papers, and they also attend and evaluate the posters at the poster session.

Additionally, the horticulture faculty serves as guest lecturers in the English course. They reinforce the importance of knowing how to search for and critically evaluate information.

Based on feedback, both students and horticulture faculty value and appreciate this teaching approach. With regards to the library instruction component of the course, the majority of students reported that the quality of the annotated bibliography and research paper were better because of the librarian's input and involvement. The majority of students also said that they were confident they knew how to find and evaluate information.

Comments from a student focus group indicate that students valued the input they received from horticulture faculty on assignments, and they enjoyed interacting with the faculty at the poster session.

"Horticulture faculty appreciated the chance to encourage students throughout their writing and presentation and to imitate the professional review process," said Gail Nonnecke.

In order for students to continue to develop their communication and information literacy skills, discipline faculty is encouraged to incorporate assignments throughout the curriculum that expand on the development of these skills. Faculty is urged to continue to collaborate with the English department and a librarian to design assignments that incorporate these skills.

"It is my perception that [students](#) are more engaged and invested in this class than in regular communication classes because the content is in their area of interest and their subject professors are personally

involved," remarked Jeanine Aune.

Because of the success of this model, other academic disciplines at Iowa State University, such as agricultural and biosystems engineering, agronomy, genetics, and microbiology, have established similar partnerships with the English department and the library.

More information: www.jnrlse.org/issues/

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