Theology Students as a Community of Researchers
by Mark Hangartner

Theology students

...as a community of researchers.

July 2014
Why are preferred information seeking behaviour models important?

For the student

• Lifelong learning

• Finding the information literacy that suits the student

Credits: CCL image from Flickr

For the Library

Change the physical environment and services.

Variety of spaces for different users and uses

☑ Individual study

☑ Unstructured and casual group study

☑ Structured and planned collaborations

☑ Research activities

“The traditional profile of students enrolled in theological colleges as young, single and male has changed significantly.... A Melbourne College of Divinity survey in 1998 revealed that only 10% of students were studying for ordained ministry and that 65% of students were married women, aged over 35.”


Comparing Deep and Surface

**Deep**
- Actively engaged
- Trial and error
- Express own ideas
- Information used to develop an argument

**Surface**
- Passive participant
- Memorising
- Summarising
- Facts and figures
- Support an existing argument
- Acquire and apply techniques


Connection between deep / surface and information seeking

**TABLE 4 Curricular information demand intensity in terms of information seeking activities.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Find: How does needed information become known to students?</th>
<th>Low Intensity</th>
<th>High Intensity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructor assigns all needed sources</td>
<td>Student discovers almost all needed sources independent of the instructor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buy book, get reserve materials</td>
<td>Heavy database and online catalog use</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None. Instructor has vetted sources</td>
<td>Many decisions about quality of information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tested for content mastery</td>
<td>Paper placing multiple sources in dialog</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Focus group questions

- Is there a connection between deep / surface and group work?
- How does a student centred environment respond to student preferences/needs?

1. How do you most prefer to work?
2. When you get an assignment what are the first things you do?
3. Being given readings or finding your own?

Alone

As a pair
In a group

Group work versus individual work

Does doing research either alone, as a pair or in a group fundamentally change the process for the student?

Contextual - appropriate for some cultures but not others?

Is there something about theology that lends it to co-operative study methods?
Focus group and limitations

- A focus group of 12 theology students met for one hour with a little warning about the nature of the questions.
  - People interact with each other
  - Mixed group of students
  - Self-selection
  - Confident about doing research
  - Sometimes moved away from the questions

Question 1

How do you most prefer to work?

- Alone
- With one person
- As a group
Question 2

How I start to work on an assignment / exam:

- Alone
- With one person
- As a group
Question 3

Guided

Open opportunity

“printed course reader”

“my own assignment topics, and research using my own skills”

Alone

With one person

As a group
Problem Based Learning (PBL)

Improved student engagement

Skills developed:
• research skills,
• negotiation and teamwork,
• reading, writing, and oral communication.

Group learning
Focus group reflections

Positive

- Great for communication skills.
- The outcome you want determines if a group process is good.
- Useful if you all have knowledge to share.

Negative

- Others in the group have incorrect information.
- Hard for part timers.
- I work alone so I can work as I please.
- Others take your ideas as their own.

Structure

- Set a timetable for partial outcomes; week by week eg have your literature review ready by week 2.
- Identify roles, provide job descriptions and checklists.
- Allow self evaluation.

Individuals

- Allow group members to do some tasks on their own.
- Provide roles for part timers.
- Use shared documents with personalised spaces.
Summary

- Student preference for individual information seeking.
- Student preference for challenging tasks with some guidance but room for self-directed research.
- Students welcomed deep learning.
- Group information seeking or PBL needs to be prepared well and allow for individual perspectives.

Directed study course
Research with “training wheels”

In 2014 an undergraduate (3rd year) research course for directed study was initiated.

14 students enrolled.

Each student:
- proposes a topic, then works with a supervisor;
- prepares an annotated bibliography & essay.
## Self evaluation

- **Library Catalogue**
- **Articles & More**
- **Theses and Dissertations**
- **Indexing databases eg ATLA**
- **Full Text databases eg Religion and Philosophy Collection**
- **Interlibrary Loan**
- **Referencing and Referencing Management software**

### Self evaluation 1 = low, 9 = high

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research tool</th>
<th>Self evaluation</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Library Catalogue</td>
<td>7.27</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles &amp; More</td>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theses and Dissertations</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indexing databases eg ATLA</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Full Text databases eg Religion and Philosophy Collection</td>
<td>4.55</td>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlibrary Loan</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referencing and Referencing Management software</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>4.97</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some issues with self evaluation

- Knowledge of the categories
- Levels 1-9 ... what is an expert?
- No-one chose not applicable

Self evaluation

- Students may perceive their own abilities and knowledge to be much higher than they actually are.
- User-friendly interfaces have an inherent advantage.

Combined session and individual consultations

• RefWorks

Creating a database of each student’s own resources.

• Student consultations

To focus on individual needs and confirm the accuracy of the self evaluation.

Evaluation from student work

• Study looked at annotated bibliographies
  – Major conclusion too little critical evaluation, good for relevance and authority.

  Rinto, Erin E. “Developing and Applying an Information Literacy Rubric to Student Annotated Bibliographies.” Evidence Based Library & Information Practice 8, no. 3 (2013): 5-18.

• Students produced draft papers and librarians advised on sources used, then evaluated final paper.
  – Some evidence of better performance

  Reinsfelder, T. L. “Citation Analysis as a Tool to Measure the Impact of Individual Research Consultations.” College & Research Libraries 73, no. 3 (2012): 263-77.
Looking at Bibliographies

• Susanna and Louise Nicholas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books / chapters</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>1999-2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Articles</td>
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<td>2001-2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2013-2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Susanna and the Elders, from the Visigothic-Mozarabic Bible of St. Isidore’s, fol.324v., A.D. 960 (tempera on vellum)

Examples from bibliography

• News (from Database)


• Internet


• Internet News
Contrasting bibliographies

Mostly books, focus on biblical commentaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chapters</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1995-2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1996-2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What about Wikipedia?

Citation


From the Page

Louise Nicholas

... a New Zealand woman who alleged that several policemen raped her and obstructed evidence in the subsequent trials for rape. [1]

... Legacy of Nicholas

On 15 December 2007, Louise Nicholas was named New Zealander of the Year[12] by the New Zealand Herald due to her courage shown during the rape trials of former policemen Rickards, Shipton and Schollum.

Nicholas has taken a role in pushing for the recognition of victim rights, advocating changes to name suppression law after a prominent entertainer received name suppression after sexually assaulting a 16-year-old girl.[13] Nicholas has been working as a survivor advocate for Rape Prevention Education. [14]
Group discussion

• Does your institution have a policy on citing Wikipedia?

• Do students get ideas from Wikipedia? If so, then is it dishonest to cite only the Wikipedia references to add academic credibility?

• Does it make a difference if the topic is controversial, i.e. are controversial topics less reliable on Wikipedia?

If you want discuss any non-scholarly sources.

Lecturer feedback

• Overall very happy with work produced.

• Individual cases where sources were adequate but could have been more up-to-date.

• Students need to become virtuosi at hunting out information.

• I am not so particular about exact reference formatting.
Photo credits

Many thanks to Jenny Harper, Library Assistant, John Kinder Theological Library for the photos of students working alone or in groups.