

**Spring 2010 Assessment of Sociology 1  
Rosenberg Library, City College of San Francisco**

**Background and Assessment Administration**

As part of an on-going assessment program of the research skills/information competency instructional offerings, students in three sections of Sociology 1 “Introduction to Sociology” participated in a pre- and post-assessment. This course has a research-based assignment that requires students “to gather information about a Pacific Rim country’s culture and social structure which will be synthesized into a written report and examine a contemporary social issue which impacts on the culture.”

During the spring 2010 semester the coordinator of library instructional services worked with the course instructor to draft a pre-assessment instrument that students completed online before the librarian presentation to the classes. While all students were encouraged by the course instructor to complete the pre-assessment, only 54 (64%) of all the students actually did the pre-assessment. Table 1 below describes the pre-assessment group’s previous experience completing research skills workshops and compares it to the post-assessment group, which completed an in-class instrument after their assignment was due near the end of the semester. There was approximately 8 to 10 week between the pre and post-assessments. As can be seen in Table 1 about 15% of the post-assessment group had completed another library research skills workshop in addition to the class presentation by the time of the post-assessment.

Table 1 Pre and Post Groups

Pre-Assessment n=54	Post-Assessment n=74 (+10 too incomplete to score)
32 (59% ) no previous instruction 22 (41%) have had one or more workshops	33 (45%) no previous instruction 41 (55%) have had one or more workshops (13 32% completed 3 or more workshops)

Working off the same outline and students learning goals for the presentation, two different librarians made the instructional presentation to the 3 sections. The presentations occurred in early April 2010, about 7 weeks before the assignment was due. The presentation was tailored to the requirements of the assignment, focusing on how students would find reliable and credible information on a chosen issue affecting a country, such as drug trafficking affecting the family structure, and social and economic conditions in Peru.

**Pre- and Post-Assessment Instruments**

Item development on both the pre and post-assessment instruments reflect the requirements of the assignment as well as some of the content of the presentation. Specific student learning outcomes (SLOs) were:

1. Increase awareness of the course webpage and the variety of search tools and information sources linked from it;
2. Select the most effective search tool for a given information need;
3. Effectively search online periodical and reference databases, such as CountryWatch;
4. Evaluate the quality of information on webpages; and

5. Increase awareness of APA citation format and how to cite articles from online databases and web pages.

Because of time constraints, not all the presentation content is reflected on the two instruments, but the common item content areas reflect what students needed to be able to do to successfully complete the assignment: select an appropriate research tool for a particular information need; evaluate web sites, interpret citations and identify required elements in an APA citation, (see attached copies of the instruments).

Tables 2 and 3 record the frequencies of responses for the pre- and post-assessment items. Since the items were not completely the same, here are the items for each instrument:

#### **Pre-Assessment**

#### **Post-Assessment**

2. Please match the information need with the best search tool to use. "Best" is understood to be the research tool that provides reliable, credible information most efficiently. (You can use a letter more than once):
    - a. get an article from a magazine or journal
    - b. background information about a country
    - c. current statistics about higher education for a country
    - d. in-depth, lengthy information about a country's history
  3. If you are researching the effects of human trafficking in Cambodia on health and used Google, which ONE webpage would you consider the most relevant and reliable for this topic?
  4. Please briefly provide one reason for your choice of the webpage URL below.
  5. Interpret the following citation that you found at the end of an article: Damm, Jens. "The Internet and the Fragmentation of Chinese Society." *Critical Asian Studies*, Jun2007, Vol. 39, Issue 2, p. 273-294. What type of information source is this?
  6. Is this an academic source?
  7. Provide one reason to explain your choice of YES or NO about whether or not it's an academic source.
- b. academic journal articles on a global issue
  - c. background information on a country's current government structure
  - a. reliable statistics about a country's literacy rate
  - d. very recent news about a border dispute
3. If you are researching the effects of internet censorship in China, which of the following webpages would you consider most likely to be credible/reliable AND objective for your project?
  4. Please provide one reason to explain your choice(s) of the webpage(s).
  5. Study the following periodical citation and UNDERLINE only the pieces required to prepare an APA citation: China and the internet: an uphill Fight for freedom (FREEDOM HOUSE PRESENTS) *Harvard International Review*, 31.2 (Summer 2009). p.68. From General OneFile. 6 pdf pages.

Note that the post-assessment has two fewer items because it was given in class and the instructor could only allow about ten minutes for completion. Also, items 3 and 5 are slightly more complex as it's assumed that students have more familiarity with APA format and evaluation of webpages by the end of the semester and after completing the assignment.

**Table 2: Pre-Assessment Findings**

Item 2. Please match the information need with the best search tools to use. (You can use a letter more than once)	Best/good	OK, but not best	Wrong
2a. get an article from a magazine or journal n=50	34 (68%)	11 (22%)	5 (10%)
2b. background information about a country n=49	37 (75%)	12 (25%)	none
2c. current statistics about higher education for a country n=49	40 (82%)	None	9 (18%)
2d. in-depth, lengthy information about a country's history n=49	41 (83.7%)	8 (16.3%)	none
<b>Item 3.</b> If you are researching the effects of human trafficking in Cambodia on health and used Google, which ONE webpage would you consider the most relevant AND reliable....? n=49	48 (98%)	none	1 (2%)
<b>Item 4.</b> Briefly provide one reason for your choice of webpage. n=49	Good/OK 13 (27%)	½ correct 19 (39%)	Poor/blank 17 (35%)
<b>Item 5.</b> Interpret the following citation....Is this a book chapter, periodical article or web article? n=53	Correct 37 (70%)	n/a	16 (30%)
Item 6. Is this an academic information source? n=49	Correct 44 (90%)	n/a	5 (10%)
Item 7. Provide one reason to explain your choice about whether or not it's an academic information source. n=43	Good/OK 9 (21%)	½ correct 7 (16%)	Poor/blank 27 (63%)
Item 8. What additional piece of information are required in an APA citation for a journal article: (3 choices provided) n=49	Correct 13 (27%)	n/a	36 (76%)

**Table 3: Post-Assessment Findings**

Item 2. Please match the information need with the best search tools to use. (You can use a letter more than once)	Best/good	OK, but not best	Wrong	
2a. reliable statistics about a country's literacy rate n=74	66 (89%)	1 (1.4%)	7 (9.6%)	
2b. academic journal articles on a global issue n=73	48 (66%)	14 (19%)	11 (15%)	
2c. background information on a country's current government structure n=74	58 (78%)	11 (15%)	5 (6.8%)	
2d. very recent news about a border dispute n=73	62 (85%)	5 (6.8%)	6 (8.2%)	
<b>Item 3.</b> If you are researching the effects of Internet censorship in China, which of the following webpages would you consider most likely to be credible/reliable AND objective for your project. Use only these titles and URLs to make your decision. (Select ALL that apply; 6 choices) n=74	All choices good 20 (28%)	All but one choice good 19 (26%)	All but 2 good 23 (32%)	3+ wrong 10 (14%)
<b>Item 4.</b> Briefly provide one reason for your choice of webpages. n=73	Good/OK 17 (23%)	½ correct 20 (27%)	Poor/blank 36 (49%)	
<b>Item 5.</b> Study the following periodical citation and UNDERLINE only the pieces required to prepare an APA	Perfect	Good (1 error)	OK (2 error)	Poor (2+)

citation:	n=56	2 (4%)	21 (38%)	21 (38%)	errors) 12 (21%)
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## Analysis and Recommendations

The same person analyzed the pre and post-assessment data, so that consistency of interpretation and procedures was maintained. The environment in which the students completed the assessment was different, however. The pre-assessment was completed online and the student could easily have consulted other online resources to answer the questions. Whereas, the post-assessment was completed in class, and from the large number of post-assessments that were not scored because they were too incomplete, one questions whether students had sufficient time to carefully complete the post-assessment.

Since the post-assessment group reveals a 14% increase in respondents who indicated having completed one or more library research skills workshops, one would expect to see consistent gains in performance, especially since the class workshop's content was targeted to the assignment. However, this is not the case. Overall, the post-assessment findings document very few gains in student performance and/or understanding.

The comparison between the two groups is problematic because several of the items are different. Looking first at the items that are essentially the same, one notes that only items 1 and 4 are nearly identical on both instruments. Gains from the pre- to post- assessment are documented only for 2 a./c (obtaining statistics for an issue). The other information needs listed in item 2. don't show any gains from pre to post, or in one case, the post-assessment shows more "wrong" responses (obtaining academic journal articles). On the other hand, between 85% and 91% selected either the best research tool or a satisfactory one. For example, item 2b. (academic journal articles on a global issue) the 19% of the respondents in the "Ok but not the best" column all selected Google or CountryWatch as the search tool, rather than periodical articles database. Item 4 which asks students to provide one reason for their choice of webpage(s), also shows a disappointing larger percentage of students who left this item blank and/or provided an incorrect response.

On the slightly more positive side, however, are the findings for two items in the post-assessment that were not asked in the pre-assessment. Item 3 required students to review and select only the webpages that "are most likely credible/reliable and objective." As they only had the URLs and titles of the webpages about censorship in China, the task was fairly complex because all six titles were relevant but only three seemingly were more credible/reliable and objective based on the URLs. Students generally selected the URLs with .edu domains. When one combines the "all correct" with "all but one" and all but two correct" one notes that 86% of the respondents are represented. Likewise item 5 which asked students to underline the elements required for an APA citation, 79% of the respondents made no more than two errors.

## Lessons Learned

Based on the analysis of both assessment instruments, the following points need to be targeted in library research skills and course-related workshops:

- Emphasize in the presentation and examples the two or three major learning outcomes, such as
  - Select the most effective search tool for a given information need;
  - Effectively search online periodical and reference databases, such as CountryWatch;
  - Evaluate the quality of information on webpages.

As part of evaluating webpages, clarify that many .org webpages will likely have a bias of some type. While it's important to relate instructional content to the class assignment, the focus should be on the two or three most important SLOs. Less is more.

- Using periodical databases, spend more time illustrating search strategy/techniques using students' topics to show the importance of using different search words; using different search strategies; and what to do when the results are too few or too many. Use a more engaging, interactive teaching methodology to accomplish this.
- Refer to the APA citation format and make sure they know how to find the handout, but spend less class time on this. Focus on the citation generators in the periodical databases.