2006

What About an Information Literacy Chapel?

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Information Literacy (IL) reminds me of those hikes where I thought I finished climbing to the summit, only to then see a higher part of the mountain. As with the mountain of assessment, it would be wonderful to pitch my tent and settle on the top plateau – but that time will never come. However, I am in great company. There is a vast host of librarians on this same quest, and I've learned new paths, seen new equipment, and received a lot of encouragement on the climb. In this spirit, I write this brief article to point to something I've been doing at Davis College, as one of a handful of information literacy strategies. Perhaps this will be something you can adapt at your own institution.

So far, I've dubbed it "Information Literacy Chapel," which is probably the worst title it could have. Who wants to go to a chapel where the speaker thinks you might not be literate? So please, if you adapt this idea, change the title. Nevertheless, one distinctive of Christian colleges is that they all have chapels. The Student Development department is always willing to give me an entire chapel every year, and I would guess this is possible for most of you as well.

In planning the chapels, I resist the temptation to squeeze into it a mini-info lit course. We need to remember the mindset with which students approach chapel. They don't want another class period, wherein the speaker barrages them with lots of information. What they do want, and demand, is an interesting and creative presentation of some sort. On these counts, we librarians cannot afford to fail.

I would insult your intelligence if I proceeded to explain what you need to communicate, as far as Information Literacy. We all have a growing knowledge of that subject. Instead I will share some of the ideas I have used to keep the interest of my audience.

In preparation for my first information chapel, I took my camcorder around campus and asked various information literacy questions. Picture students riding the exercise bike in the workout center, or sitting at a newspaper reading table in the library, or other interesting places, answering on-the-spot questions. I also put myself in the presentation disguised as a hippie-like person with a wig and dopey accent, who proudly held all the wrong answers. Some of the questions I asked were these:

1. What is information literacy?

2. How important is it to be discerning in your choice of on-line sources for a research paper?

3. How important is it to be ethical in your use of information sources?

The students had a lot of fun doing this. When you show something like this to introduce your main points in your information literacy chapel, students will be right with you. The chapel audience expects the librarian to harp on ethics in information usage, but when students explain how important this is, it is a lot more powerful. Plus, it's good for some laughs.

Concerning handout notes, I've used them, and not used them. The students may not have a place to put a handout of library notes amidst all their other stuff, so probably most notes were thrown away. However, the value of following the student notes in chapel may have been worth the trouble – or maybe not. You decide. If you do make handouts, they should be just as creative and interesting as your presentation.

Students love humorous audiovisual presentations, assuming they are well done. I have produced two for the students. Being at a smaller college, I don't have the means to produce sophisticated and professional products. Both of my

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ABSTRACT

Information Literacy chapels can be an effective means to supplement other library education strategies. They offer a unique opportunity to address the entire student body at one time. They should not be run as a class, but rather as a creative presentation that makes a few points well. Audiovisual presentations and audience participation can enhance the appeal and learning.

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audiovisual presentations used PowerPoint slides, timed with some very catchy music. My first presentation used stick figures as the main characters of a story, along with photographs highlighting various library services. Having a music background, I remembered a few compelling movements from Gustav Holst's *The Planets* to accompany the presentation. I'm told, if I may brag a little, that my stick figures are very winsome (it's my only claim to fame). Overall, the students love the program's dry humor and hyperbole.

I introduced this presentation to the students in chapel this Fall semester. We purchased a number of new on-line databases, so the presentation used a lot of humor and very funny animal photographs to overview the new databases. When the presentation got to the announcement of the new databases, the music switched to Aaron Copland's, *Fanfare for the Common Man*, which was the most dignified music I could think of to present these new services. Some of the slides included pictures of celebrities with their endorsements – all obviously fictional. For instance, Albert Einstein applauded our college for the science database, and President Bush was impressed with our database on government sites. Bill Gates exclaimed, "Now I know what cutting edge is!" The Librarian of Congress admitted how "sinfully jealous" he was of our services, and Tiger Woods informed everyone at the end that the celebrity quotes were indeed made up. Yes, it sounds corny, but through the doses of information literacy, they had some laughs.

I ended last year's IL chapel with some student participation. I invited a male and female from each class (freshmen and upward) to come up to the podium. Of course, each class had a 10-second popularity contest raging, and after some laughing and cat calls, I had my eight people. I then presented each class team with a different IL challenge to solve, using my

laptop, which was projected on the big screen. The students used some of the principles I had just reviewed to compete for the prizes I laid on the table (bags of candy bars, of course). There was lots of noise, cheering and hints being thrown from the audience, and in the end, the freshmen won. Yes, that's not a misprint. The freshmen won.

These are some of the crazy methods I've used along the way. However, the main points I want to communicate in this article are these:

1. Get a library chapel. You can easily justify this from all of our accreditation requirements for information literacy.

2. Make a handful of good points, but don't make it another class. Use other IL opportunities to get in more content.

3. Use the creativity and ingenuity God gave you and your staff. The kind of methods I shared above may not be your style. If you have not already done so, think long and hard to discover how you can make a 40-minute presentation on information literacy informative, yet fun. You may want to mix up the presentation, so that you are doing a few different things rather than using one method all the way through. This will help to engage more students.

4. Make sure you change your presentation and improve on what you have done from year to year.

Information Literacy chapels may not get us to the summit (to return to our first metaphor). They are another possible path on our continuing journey up the information literacy mountain, and may represent your only chance to speak to the whole student body at one time. Excelsior! ☦

Think long and hard to discover how you can make a 40-minute presentation on information literacy informative, yet fun.