



Customer Success Case Study

Norwich University
Northfield, VT
Academic
2,000 undergraduate students
1,750 graduate students
Related EBSCO Solutions:
CINAHL on EBSCOhost

“Once they see that CINAHL is faster than Google, the sales job is over ... They just have to see it for themselves. It’s much more powerful.”

Ellen F. Hall, Director of Kreitzberg Library at Norwich University

Challenges	Solutions	Benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Steer nursing students away from using Google and similar search engines for academic study; reinforcing the importance of professional development through research• Lecture hall setting detrimental to the teaching/learning experience• Monitoring student progress following initial instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Google vs. CINAHL (on <i>EBSCOhost</i>) demonstration, highlighting the better functionality, precision searching and more relevant results of the latter• Smaller, seminar-style lab classrooms• “Search strategy” incorporated into project requirements/grading system	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Better, more accurate research resulting in better research projects• Student/researcher confidence higher due to personalized instruction• Development of positive, lasting research habits

Improving Information Literacy and Academic Success of Freshman Nursing Students

Overview

For nursing students at Norwich University, strong research skills are vital not only for academic success but also a necessary foundation for proficiency as medical professionals. Employing revised teaching practices, electronic classrooms and online databases, Library Director Ellen Hall works with students, faculty and staff to elevate the level of effective research performed by freshman and graduate students alike.

Challenges

Prior to 2001, new students at the historic university were introduced to online research in large classes with little to no hands-on instruction. Also missing was an effective feedback-gathering process to ensure students were getting what they needed from presentations. Added to this was the challenge of getting hundreds of "Google-minded" newcomers to use something besides the ubiquitous search engine for their electronic research.

Solution

After taking the position of Library Director at Norwich University in 2001, Hall realized incoming freshmen weren't getting the training they needed to become proficient online researchers. "Before I came, classes were held in a large room with one computer and all the students (about 60) came to watch the librarian use CINAHL."

Hall still uses the CINAHL database, but in order to get students more involved in the learning process, she cut class sizes by 75% and dramatically changed the classroom environment.

"One of the first things we did was to build an electronic classroom," says Hall. Now students sit in groups of 12 to 15 around a seminar table, swiveling around to individual computer stations with all screens facing center each at a computer station with all the screens facing the center.

Instead of watching a demonstration from a distance in a lecture-hall setting they get personal, hands-on instruction and learn by using the resources themselves. And because all monitors can be viewed by the instructor, students are less likely to stray off course. "It's a good way to keep them off email," chuckles Hall.

Hall described a recent session with a group of incoming freshmen whose first assignment was to find articles about a "wellness issue" and prepare a 5-minute presentation on what they read - a fairly simple exercise, but also a perfect opportunity to demonstrate the importance of information literacy. The goal of the presentation is fairly modest: to make the new students aware of better research options and provide them with a basic set of search skills.

"I bring in 15 issues of nursing journals, some copies of *Nursing* and *AJN* (American Journal of Nursing) and several specialty journals. Each student has an issue," explains Hall. Since some students might not recognize the difference between magazines and journals, Hall starts with the basics. "We talk about what a journal is, what it looks like, how some are general and some are specific, what are your favorites. I explain to them that, just like at home, individual nurses do not subscribe to hundreds of magazines." Hall's point is to show students that while they could never hope to read through the stacks of nursing journals published each year, they can use *CINAHL* to search for pertinent information in a large number of publications at once.

Once they have a basic grasp of *CINAHL*'s content, Hall uses the students' wellness assignment to demonstrate the database's capabilities with a side-by-side comparison with Google. The lesson serves two purposes: providing a basic understanding of *CINAHL* (via *EBSCOhost*) search functions and dispelling the misconception - common among freshmen, says Hall - that online research starts and ends with internet search engines.



Director Ellen Hall, among the stacks at Kreitzberg Library

Hall selects a health issue, in this case "weight control," and polls the class for suggestions on how to search for the information.

"I don't ask how *they'd* do it because they'll tell me what they think I want to hear or they set themselves up for embarrassment later in the class by saying 'Google,'" explains Hall. "I ask 'How would most people look this up?' and they say 'Google' ... I have them direct me on everything."

A search for "weight control" on Google yields around 150,000,000 results (at the time this article was written). Switching gears, Hall asks the class to run the same search on *CINAHL with Full Text*. The results are far more manageable - under 2,500.

Since the assignment calls for students to find recent articles from peer-reviewed nursing journals, Hall next asks "How do we find something that's written for nurses?" A quick check of Google's basic and advanced search screens reveals no such option, while the Journal Subset limiter on *EBSCOhost* offers a "Nursing" value which reduces the result list to less than 500 when selected.

Hall repeats this process several times over, using publication date, peer-reviewed, full-text and age group limiters to narrow the results on *CINAHL*, and each time directs students back to Google to show the search engine's limitations. The Google result list remains in the tens of millions while the *CINAHL* list is reduced and refined until 9 full-text articles are left.

"Once they see that *CINAHL* is faster than Google, the sales job is over. They just have to see it for themselves. It's much more powerful," says Hall.

In addition to the hands-on teaching method and altering of the physical environment, Hall has implemented other successful changes which have aided students in their retention and application of skills learned in her classes. Rather than use generic or hypothetical queries, she bases lessons on assigned projects, a tactic with present and future ramifications. She tells students, "I promise you, you'll get a better grade if you use what I'm teaching you today. But this is a skill you'll (also) be using in practice. It's not more important than learning how to do an injection, but it's no less important either."

Hall has also found that when classes are held in conjunction with assigned projects, the message is more likely to hit home. "Unless there's a reason for the student to learn something that's kind of immediate, there's no point," she says. "There has to be a need for them, a real assignment where a grade will be applied." Working with professors, librarians coordinate programs with class projects and schedules, and monitor student progress.

In some cases, students are required to hand in search strategies with their assignments. Hall checks (and occasionally assists in grading) their work to make sure the tools and techniques she teaches are being put to good use. Instructions and a description of an acceptable search strategy are provided, as seen below.

Part of the grade for this project is based on demonstrating your ability to use a database to identify studies evaluating the effectiveness of interventions for a disease, disorder or injury.

An acceptable search strategy will include each of the following elements:

- **the appropriate subject heading for the disease, disorder or injury**
- **a subject heading or subheading for the therapy**
- **a subject heading that identifies studies of efficacy**
- **a set of articles resulting from combining all of the above elements**

Please submit your search strategy, with your name on it, attached to your research paper.

To keep herself in check, Hall relies on written assessments of her program. But rather than hand them out at the end of a class, when students are already concentrating on their next activity, she distributes them to professors who hand them out a day or two before research papers are due. Hall says students are far more likely to provide honest and insightful feedback when they aren't rushing to another class and after they have had a chance to practice on their own.

"Most just say 'Wonderful, thanks,' but I look for the one or two with something constructive," Hall explains. "In every group there's a pearl."

Benefits

In an age when so much information is available at the click of a mouse, Hall's demonstration has proved to be a simple yet effective way of showing students the ease and precision with which they can track down relevant, current, and even peer-reviewed literature. By the end of a 90-minute session, she says, students are more than convinced. "It's like being at a camp meeting," says Hall. "They're leaping up saying 'I believe.'"

But there is a big difference between knowing something is good for you and actually putting it to use. Hall explains that students are far more likely to use newfound skills if they feel comfortable with the process.

With smaller classes and a more controlled environment, she says it is far easier to assess comprehension levels, even as her presentation is still in progress.

"It's very important for freshman that they not leave the room without having a sense of success," Hall tells us. "Humps and bumps will happen but we get them over them right there ... I keep them in a controlled environment until they have one good experience. Everyone leaves feeling impressed with themselves."

"On the spot" assessments reveal that the vast majority of the students she teaches feel they can use CINAHL on their own. And judging by the follow-up response from students and professors alike, the good feelings don't end there either.

Hall's fellow-educators have described her demonstrations as "splendid, thoughtful, well-focused and highly useful" as well as "well designed and executed." When asked to compare work handed in before and after students attend Hall's seminar, professors are overwhelmingly positive in their responses. "They tell us the quality of the papers is so much better," says Hall.

"Our ultimate goal is that the day after graduation everyone can find information to support decision-making within their field of choice," Hall explains. "We want to get them ready to be what they are supposed to be."

