Teaching Academic Research and Writing

Or, Two Works in Progress

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ABSTRACT In Fall 2016, the Wake Forest University School of Divinity offered a for-credit academic research and writing course for the first time as a way to address concerns regarding the academic preparedness of incoming students. As the subject specialist for the School of Divinity, the author co-taught Introduction to Research and Writing with the School's academic skills counselor, who led the writing portion of the class. As a result of our experience teaching the class, and in consultation with the academic dean, we decided that a two-tier research and writing course structure would best serve the needs of our student population.

In Fall 2017, we taught the second-tier course, Advanced Research and Writing, which was targeted to students who intended to pursue doctoral work, or who were in the midst of research-intensive independent studies or senior projects. This presentation summary will focus on the syllabus and course structure, including assignments and learning objectives, as well as lessons learned as we look towards the future of the course.

Note: Full course syllabi, assignments, and readings, along with the 2018 Conference presentation PowerPoint can be found at: https://bit.ly/2sAC4s3.

BACKGROUND

The Z. Smith Reynolds (ZSR) Library of Wake Forest University is in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. ZSR serves both undergraduate and graduate programs, with populations of approximately 5,000 and 1,600 students, respectively. The library is open 24/5 during the

academic year, and has thirty-four library faculty and twenty-six library staff.

The library faculty at ZSR have taught for-credit undergraduate information literacy courses since 2003. These courses have proved popular with students and have been expanded from the introductory LIB100: Academic Research and Information Issues course to include a variety of 200-level discipline-specific courses.[1]

The School of Divinity at Wake Forest was founded in 1999. It currently has approximately 120 enrolled students and seventeen faculty. While there are several joint degrees offered by the School, the majority of students are working towards a Master of Divinity degree in a face-to-face teaching environment. The School does not have a separate library collection, so students and faculty use the resources of ZSR, and they are enthusiastic users of those resources. In order to provide targeted services to this population in the past, I have created a biblical studies research area in the Reference Department,[2] offered topical research workshops, and held weekly office hours in the School of Divinity building.

MIN790D: INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH & WRITING

Developing the Course

In addition to the existing library services for the School of Divinity, I was interested in offering a for-credit research course in the hopes of addressing some of the issues that had been noticed by faculty, including an increase in plagiarism incidences, the selection of inappropriate resources for research, and poor writing skills. I also didn't want to take on teaching a graduate-level course by myself, so I partnered with the academic skills counselor for the School of Divinity, Hilary Floyd, who was also an alumna of the School and had experience teaching college-level writing skills. With the support of my director and the academic dean of the School of Divinity, we submitted a course proposal in January 2016 and were approved in February 2016. We spent the next several months planning the course, and it was added to the course schedule for Fall 2016.

Syllabus

MIN790D: Introduction to Research & Writing was a one-credit course that met in one-and-three-quarter-hour sessions for the first seven

Fridays of the semester, with ten students enrolled. After the introductory session, the first three classes focused on research and types of resources, while the last three classes were devoted to writing and presentations. Course points were also equally divided between research and writing topics, and Hilary and I were responsible for our respective class lectures and assignment grading.

The course description and learning objectives were as follows:

This course will introduce students to writing and research in biblical and theological studies. Students will learn the foundational aspects of planning, writing, and revising academic papers as well as how to access and evaluate resources for research. We will also discuss important reading strategies, organizational practices, and appropriate citations.

By completing this course, students should be able to:

1. Practice effective reading strategies for comprehension and retention.
2. Access reference books, scholarly books, and academic journal articles for research.
3. Write critical evaluations of research sources.
4. Create an outline and craft a strong thesis statement for longer papers.
5. Incorporate research into written work and cite resources properly.

The course assignments totaled 100 points and were divided amongst the following assignments:

- Research:
  - Annotated Bibliography Project (30%)
    Using an approved biblical studies, church history, or theology research topic, students will locate, analyze, and cite an appropriate source in each of the following categories:
    ◦ Scholarly Reference Resource
    ◦ Scholarly Book Resource
    ◦ Scholarly Journal Article Resource
  - Faculty or Clergy Interview (10%) and Presentation (5%)
    Students will interview a School of Divinity faculty member or

a clergy member with an MDiv based on the provided interview questions and share their experience with the class.

- Writing:
  - Academic Plan (15%)
    Using their course syllabi and personal calendars, students will fill in calendars for the semester reflecting class sessions, assignments, and personal responsibilities, and outline their strategies for completing their coursework.
  - Analysis and Close Reading of Two Articles (20%)
    Students will analyze two scholarly articles, one in common to the class and one of their own selection. We will discuss the first article as a class, and then the students will pair up and share their rough drafts before turning in their final work the following week.
  - Meeting with a Writing Center counselor and Report (5%)
    At some time during the semester, each student will make an appointment with a counselor at the campus Writing Center. They will write a reflection on the content of their meeting and how it affected their writing.

- Other:
  - Attendance, Participation, and In-Class Exercises (15%)
  - Attend a Zotero Citation Class (+2% Extra Credit)

As *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations* (Turabian) is the required citation manual for the School, it seemed natural to use it as one of the required textbooks for the course.[3] In addition to consulting the citation guidelines, we had the students read the first five chapters of the text, which covered topic selection and creating academic arguments. The other required textbook was *Working with Words*, which Hilary incorporated during the writing portion of the course.[4] We placed portions of three resources on course reserves:

- *The Seminary Student Writes*,[5] Chapters 1-3
- *Reading Theologically*,[6] Chapters 1, 2, and 5
- *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*,[7] Chapters 3 and 8

Sample Class Plan and Assignment: Scholarly Book

During the lecture on scholarly book resources, I pulled about thirty books from the stacks as examples of the various categories of books that could be used for research. The students were able to pick the books up, flip through them, and see if they could tell what type of book resource it might be or what might be distinctive about it. The categories included monograph, edited volume, anthology, commentary, festschriften, primary source, critical edition, and collected works. On the lecture handout there were empty boxes with the category names in them, and as we talked about the various types of resources, the students filled in the boxes with features and examples. For the remainder of the lecture, I discussed topical search strategies and demonstrated using the library catalog. At the end of class we did an exercise on Turabian book citations and, if we had had time, would have done an exercise on deciphering footnotes to find resources.

For the Scholarly Book Assignment, the students were required to find either a monograph or an edited volume relating to their topic. The book could be either in print or an ebook, but had to be something in the ZSR holdings. After describing their search process, the students needed to give the correct Turabian citation for their source, and include the Turabian rule number if there was anything unusual about their source. The remainder of the assignment was their summary and evaluation of the resource, using prompts such as:

- What information can you find out about the author? What credentials do they have?
- Is the publisher a university press, religiously affiliated, or a scholarly publisher?
- How extensive is the bibliography? Does it include early as well as recent literature?
- When was the source published? Is the research up to date?
- How is it organized? Is the method of organization logical and useful?
- What is the general argument of the work? Does the author indicate a methodological approach?

- How does this source help you begin to answer your research question or address your research topic?
- How would you incorporate this information into your paper? Is it simply background information, or is there a specific piece of information you might quote or paraphrase?

Outcomes

As we taught the course, it became clear that the students needed significantly more assistance than Hilary or I had anticipated when we planned the course. Most of the students were second- or third-career students who had been admitted on academic probation and had worked in sectors where humanities-based approaches were, not unreasonably, unfamiliar. Our students were also dealt a number of health issues that impacted their ability to attend class and complete assignments.

After the course was completed, we met with the academic dean to discuss how to proceed in future versions of the course. We decided on a two-course sequence of research and writing courses, with the following areas of focus:

- Introduction to Research and Writing
  - Focus on citations, plagiarism, basic searching, and writing skills.
  - Give students completed assignment examples so that expectations are clear.
  - Ample class time for hands-on student practice at searching, looking in the stacks, and working on citations.
- Advanced Research and Writing
  - Assist students who are working on independent study courses, senior projects, or applying to PhD programs.
  - Highlight advanced research approaches and lesser-used resources.
  - Share strategies for completing longer research projects and preparing writing samples.

The advanced course was proposed and approved during Spring 2017 and added to the course schedule for Fall 2017.

MIN790D: ADVANCED RESEARCH & WRITING

Syllabus

MIN790D: Advanced Research & Writing continued to be offered as a one-credit course. We started slightly later in the semester to give students a better idea of the research projects they might need help with. We shortened our class meeting time to ninety minutes and met for eight sessions rather than seven. Twelve students, mostly third-years, enrolled in the class, and we had two students who had been part of the Introduction course the previous year. Class sessions and assignments continued to be divided evenly between research and writing, but rather than devoting entire class sessions to one or the other, we tackled both topics in each class session.

The course description and learning objectives were as follows:

The course will introduce students to advanced writing and research methods in biblical and theological studies. Through assignments such as preparing annotations for specific types of research sources and learning strategies for completing significant writing projects, students will develop skills that will support their work in the School of Divinity and any future graduate degrees they may pursue. This course is geared for students who are completing their Art of Ministry III project, working on an independent study course, or who are considering PhD studies.

By completing this course, students should be able to:

1. Understand the components of critical reading and analysis.
2. Be able to plan and create outlines for various types of academic papers.
3. Provide meaningful written analysis of different types of research resources.
4. Understand and apply the required formats for academic papers.
5. Provide appropriate and correct citations for sources and complete a bibliography/works cited page.
6. Explore the variety of sources available via ZSR holdings and databases and understand how to access, evaluate, and utilize them for research.

The course assignments totaled 100 points and were divided amongst the following assignments:

- Research:
  - Resource Assignments (30%)
    Using an approved biblical studies, church history, or theology research topic, students will locate, analyze, and cite an appropriate source in each of the following categories:
    - Specialized Reference Source OR Specialized Scholarly Book
    - Specialized Scholarly Article
    - Primary Source or Digital Collection
  - Faculty Interview (5%) and Presentation (5%)
  Students will interview a School of Divinity faculty member regarding their approach to research, both in their schooling and as a professor, and present their findings to the class.
  - Research Reflection (5%)
    Write a 1-2 page reflection essay on how their approach to research and writing has developed or changed during this course.
- Writing:
  - Academic Writing and Research Plan (10%)
    Students will map out their approach and strategies for completing their research and writing projects.
  - Analysis and Close Reading of Article (15%)
    Read and analyze a scholarly article selected by the instructors. Prepare a 1-2 page summary and analysis paper in response to the article.
  - Editing Write-up (15%)
    Students will share drafts of a writing project with a partner. After reviewing their partner's draft they will share 2-3 pages of specific, constructive feedback and suggestions with their partner.
- Other:
  - Attendance, Participation, and In-class Exercises (15%)
  - Attend a Zotero Citation Workshop (+2% Extra Credit)
  - Social Media Project (+3% Extra Credit)
    Find a scholar or theologian who uses Twitter or Facebook or has a podcast or a web presence. What do they post or share?

How do they interact with followers or commenters? Write a 1-2 page summary of what you discover and learn from what they do online.

A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (Turabian) remained our textbook, and we additionally had the students read Chapter 10 on writing introductions and conclusions. The only other readings Hilary and I assigned related to integrating the ACRL *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* into the course. For the second class session, I shared the *Framework*, as well as two short readings discussing the plagiarism of a pastor's work by a well-known author, and led a discussion on how the ideas distilled in the *Framework* might interact with their future ministry work.[8]

Specialized Resource Assignments

In planning an advanced research course, I struggled with how to still include source evaluations but make them more interesting and useful to students doing more complex research. I settled on creating assignments that would require them to use sources that I felt were underutilized (*Oxford Bibliographies* products) or specific types of sources that they might already be familiar with (book reviews, primary sources in digital collections). Another goal of using several of these types of resources (festschriften, interviews, scholarly responses) was to show students the importance of building scholarly networks and how scholarship as a conversation works in practice.

- Specialized Reference or Scholarly Book Resource
  - For their first resource assignment, the students could select a reference resource from one of our online collections or a scholarly book from a specific category of books. The online reference collections included Oxford Biblical Studies Online, Oxford Bibliographies Online (Biblical or Islamic Studies), Oxford Handbooks Online (Religion), and Routledge Handbooks Online. I wanted to be sure that everyone could find a resource for the assignment, so in case the reference resources were too restrictive in their coverage to meet the possible student research topics, I also gave them the option to use a scholarly book resource. The students had to use a resource that fell into one of these categories: collected or

> edited volume, festschrift, series, and companion or hand-book.

- Specialized Scholarly Journal Article
  - For the second assignment, the students had to find a scholarly article in a format type that they are usually steered away from using for papers: book or literature review (of at least three books), an in-depth interview with a scholar/scholars, scholarly responses or conversations via articles, and a theme issue of a journal. As students continue in academia, these are the types of sources they will need to start consulting to understand their disciplines and the research networks that make it up.

- Primary Source or Digital Collection
  - For the last resource assignment, the students needed to find a primary source or digital collection related to their topic. The options for this assignment were quite broad, and suggestions for places to look included critical editions, anthologies, archives, museums, newspapers, images, and digital projects. In their assignments, students selected seminal texts in their fields, interviews with musicians, and critical editions of texts. As part of the class session for this topic, we visited our Special Collections and Archives department for an overview of archival research practices and to view documents housed in the collections.

FUTURE PLANS

At present, it is unclear if this two-part course sequence will continue in this form. My teaching partner, Hilary Floyd, has moved on to pursue a PhD in New Testament, so currently there is no co-instructor for the course. I was asked to continue teaching the introductory course, so that is the plan for the Fall 2018 semester; however, beyond that it is unclear if the advanced course will continue as well.

NOTES

1   Kaeley McMahan, "Humanities Information Literacy: Developing and Improving a For-Credit Course," *American Theological Library Association Summary of Proceedings* 69 (2015): 232-237,

https://www.atla.com/community/ATLA Member Publica-tions/2015 Summary of Proceedings.pdf.

2   Kaeley McMahan, "Making Space for Research," *American Theological Library Association Summary of Proceedings* 71 (2017): 215-217, https://www.atla.com/community/ATLA Member Publi-cations/2017 Proceedings.pdf.

3   Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, 8th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

4   Brian Brooks, James L. Pinson, and Jean Gaddy Wilson, *Working with Words*, 8th ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2012).

5   Deborah Core, *The Seminary Student Writes* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000).

6   Eric D. Barreto, ed., *Reading Theologically* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014).

7   William Zinsser, *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfic-tion*, 7th ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2006).

8   "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education," Association of College and Research Libraries, adopted January 11, 2016, http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework; Emma Wenner, "Clinton Devotional Book Pulled after Publisher Finds Further Instances of Plagiarism," *Publishers Weekly*, September 6, 2017, https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/industry-news/religion/article/74713-clinton-devotional-book-pulled-after-publisher-finds-further-instances-of-plagiarism.html; Emily C. Heath, "Plagiarism, Privilege, and the State of Christian Publishing," Ministry Matters, published September 11, 2017, https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/8410/plagiarism-privilege-and-the-state-of-christian-publishing.